

BRITAIN'S BEST PC GAMES MAG PCZONE.CO.UK

PCZONE

ISSUE 222 AUGUST 2010



FALLOUT: NEW VEGAS

We've played it!

Hands-on with the
irradiated classic!

EXCLUSIVE!

**HUGE
PREVIEW
SPECIAL!**

FABLE III

MOLYNEUX'S RPG CLASSIC
RETURNS TO PC!

RAGE

THE POST-APOCALYPTIC
FPS RESURFACES!

MEDAL OF HONOR

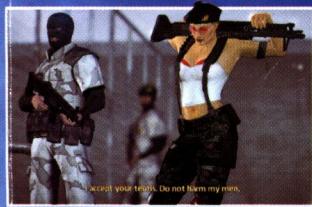
NEW DETAILS! THE CLASSIC
SHOOTER GOES MODERN!

STARRAFT

WINGS OF LIBERTY

The ultimate guide to the RTS of the decade...

- Campaigns revealed • Strategies exposed
- Exclusive interviews



ALPHA PROTOCOL

Reviewed! Can this spy thriller truly be a Bond-beater?



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- STAR WARS: THE OLD REPUBLIC • GUILD WARS 2

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AUGUST 2010


WIN!
TINY COMPO

Best explanation of what
the hell Lord was about
wins a prize!

AS A MODERN DAY SPY...

TACTICAL.

COVERT.

KILL.

YOUR WEAPON IS CHOICE...■

SUBVERT.

UNDERCOVER.

COERCE.

SEDUCE.

**WILL YOU
SEDUCE AND SUBVERT,
OR KILL AND COERCE?**

"... gamers could have a unique experience on their hands, and worthy to boot.



STEAL.

"There are many reasons why Alpha Protocol could be very special indeed, as there's nothing quite like it.

PlayGamer

"... there are enough good ideas here to suggest Alpha Protocol will come out as an elegant hybrid.

PlayStation.
Official Magazine - UK

FIREPOWER.



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SABOTAGE.

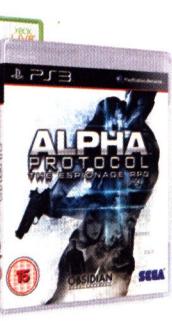
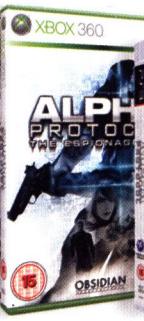
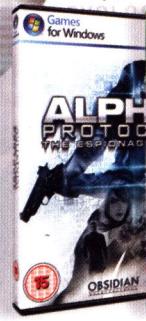
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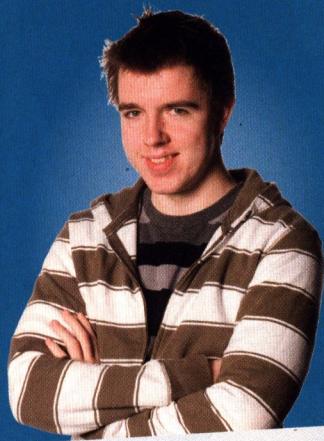
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PCZONE

Contents

BLIZZ'NESS

WELL, THIS IS big, isn't it? We've only gone ahead and opened the doors on what Blizzard are claiming is the true focal point of *StarCraft II* - its giant single player campaign. The world's most monied developers are aware of their obligations on the multiplayer side of things, and they're confident that those interested solely in taking the game online will be utterly catered for, but they're also about to convert the average schmuck, with his laughable clicks per minute, into a card-carrying fan. A dangerous boast? Probably, but we honestly reckon it's one worth taking seriously.

Blizzard have been out of the game for a while, in many ways. Having created such a behemoth in *World of Warcraft*, it's startlingly easy for a generation of PC gamers to overlook exactly how much of a development powerhouse the Californian studio actually are. In *StarCraft II* we may well be seeing a return to the Blizzard of decades past, a reclaiming of a crown now most widely considered to belong to Valve - that of the biggest and loudest champion of PC gaming.

Further down the line there's *Diablo III* to consider, and then there's the remake of *Blackthorne* which I've convinced myself they're doing having had an amazing dream about it. I played it all the way through; it's *Deus Ex* meets *Prey*. Easily an 89%.

Steve Hogarty
Acting Editor
steve.hogarty@futurenet.com

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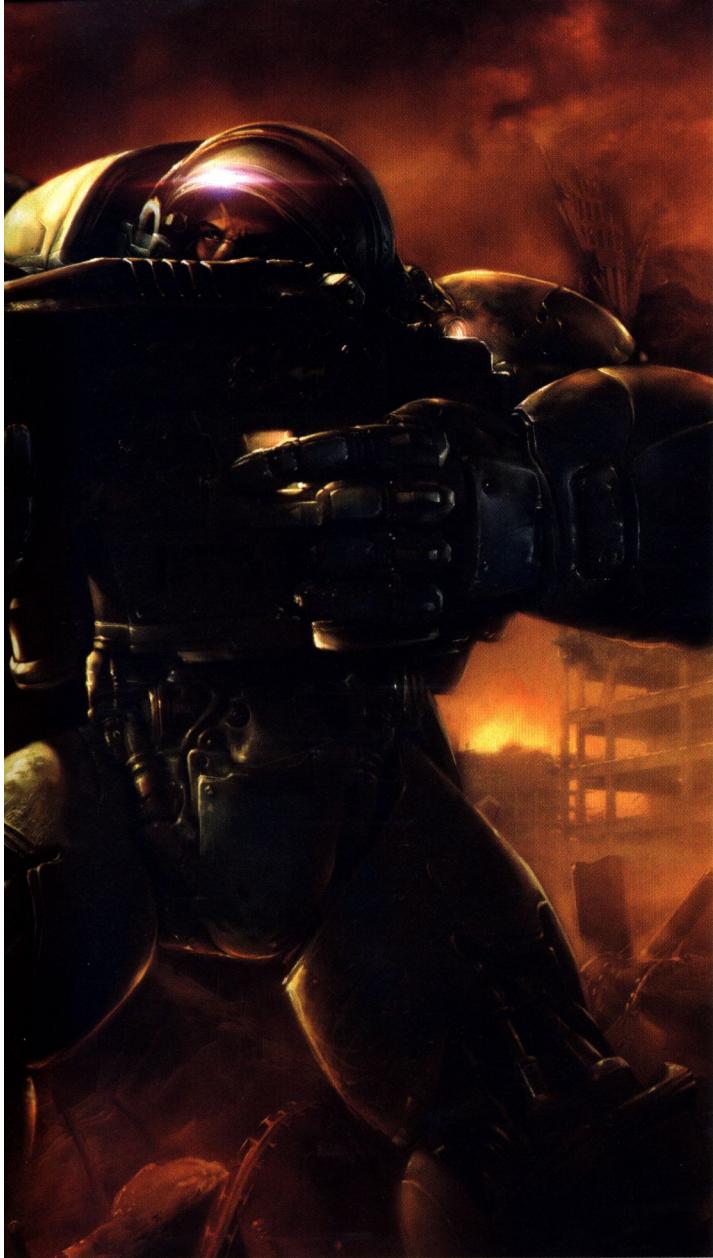


STARCRAFT II: WINGS OF LIBERTY

The long-awaited sequel is almost here. Find out all you need to know about *StarCraft* past and future

54 → **FALLOUT: NEW VEGAS**
Find out just how much of Van Buren has been gambled away





84

SPLIT/SECOND: VELOCITY

Fast cars and collapsing buildings. What's not to love about this racer?

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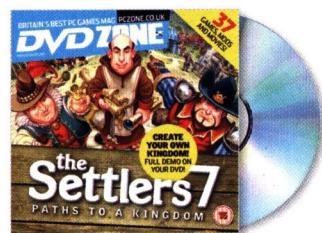
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Meet The Team

They're responsible for it all officer!



STEVE HOGARTY

Emogarty

AGE 23

LIKES Eternal soul-torment

DISLIKES The authority, parents

FANCIES Zooey Deschanel

FAVOURITE GAME Frontier: Elite II

NOW PLAYING Metro 2033



DAVID BROWN

Metal Head

"But it's the World Cup!" wailed David, when Mr Hogarty refused to give him a month off, so he could spend his time watching football.

NOW PLAYING Splinter Cell: Conviction



JON 'LOG' BLYTH

Pseudo-freelancer

Freelancers normally spend their days at home writing articles in the pyjamas. Not Log: he spends more time in our office now than where he actually worked for ZONE.

NOW PLAYING Mass Effect 2



WILL PORTER

Freelance person

When we asked Will what the hell Jordan Thomas was talking about in Developer's Commentary, he just shrugged his shoulders.

NOW PLAYING Splinter Cell: Conviction

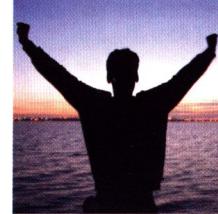


JAMES HOLLOWAY

Workie

James made an odd workie chap for one reason: he wasn't in his teens or at university. He was a fully grown, if unemployed, man. Like we said: odd.

NOW PLAYING Dragon Age



ADAM GLICK

Returning hero

Glick has been away, but came back and churned out a vast number of pages. When asked where he'd been, he muttered, "If I told you, I'd have to slap you."

NOW PLAYING GTA: Episodes



STEVE HILL

Another freelancer

Everyone who knows Hill, knows he loathes MMO. Yet he's probably played more MMOs than anyone on the planet. So he's either lying, or is a masochist.

NOW PLAYING Allods Online

WHAT'S HELPED THIS MONTH... Hot, hot sunlight, and planes being able to fly.
WHAT HASN'T HELPED THIS MONTH... Bank holidays and an immovable deadline.

WHAT WE'VE BEEN TALKING ABOUT...

LOST **3.4hrs** The only question left is "What the hell?"

HEAT **2hrs** A sudden outbreak of sunlight and warmth confused everyone.

SPOTIFY VS LAST.FM **4hrs** It's the online music war.

FOOTBALL **Weeks** The World Cup is upon us.

MOVING OUT **39mins** David's continual phone calls from rental agents, desperate for his money.

FACEBOOK PRIVACY **3min** Just don't put stuff on the internet. Idiot.

HUMAN CENTIPEDE **4min** A welcome return of the mad scientist.

SYDNEY NINJA **7min** "Sic 'em," said their sensei. And they did.

TORYLAND **8min** The Tories are back in power. May God have mercy on us.

TWO CAREFUL OWNERS **3min** The Batmobile is up for grabs. We want!

WIN!



HOW TO ENTER Text TINY followed by your answer, name and email address to 87474; or send your answer, name, post address and phone number to Tiny Comp, PC ZONE Future Publishing, 2 Balcombe Street, London, NW1 6NW, or by email to letters@zoo.co.uk (st Tiny COMPO as the subject). The winner will be picked at random from all correct entries and will receive a copy of *Ghostbusters: The Video Game*. The winner will be notified within 28 days of the closing date. Texts will be charged at 50p plus your normal network tariff. By entering this competition, you consent to us using your personal details to send you information about products and services which may be of interest to you. If you do not want to receive this, include the word "STOP" at the end of your text or postal entry.

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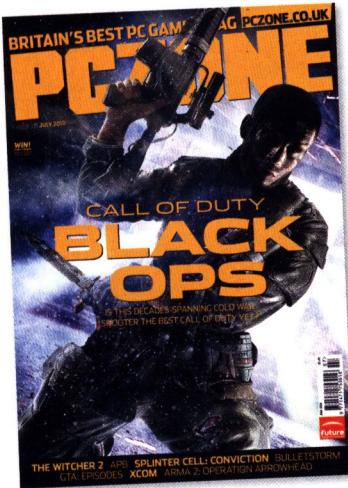
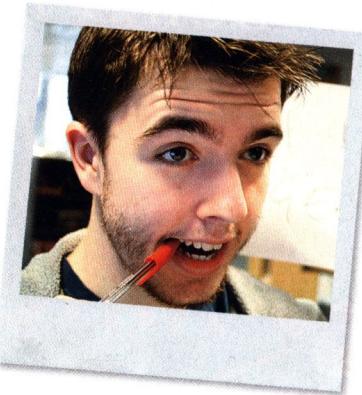
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gamigo

Letters

Steve Hogarty braves a deluge of digital correspondence, and for what? This?



WIN!

If your letter is picked out to become the King (or Queen) of these here pages, you will receive your own copy of *Splinter Cell: Conviction* (or at least another good game we have knocking around the office).

THE FLIPSIDE

[As it's an insightful response to our DRM feature last issue, we've decided to print this letter from a developer in full. Normal service (ie your ramblings



about our Modern Warfare 2 review) will resume next month. – Ed]

As a videogame developer and someone that was very disappointed recently

KING OF LETTERS

A FURIOUS MING

It seems strange that a form of entertainment which is so 'now', which makes use of cutting-edge technology, and is very much a product of the 21st century could be so stuck in the past. I'm a gay gamer – and I know I'm not the only one – but I feel it's about time that videogames were a little more reflective of their audience.

I'm not asking for games to be flooded with gay sex, or for the hero of a game to be some kind of camp cliché. I understand very clearly that the best part of the game-buying public wouldn't identify with a character like that and would be alienated (I probably would as well), but surely we can handle a little bit of choice in our games?

Role-playing games are the most obvious place for this change to take place, since they give the greatest possibility for choice. RPGs are becoming increasingly sexual – *The Witcher*, for example – but it's always assumed that the hero is straight.



Furious Ming – unturnable.

However, there are worse offenders. Take *Jade Empire*: you have the option to play a male or a female hero/heroine, and there is the opportunity to have a female or a male love interest. Have you ever tried to play a male hero who gets the guy? It just can't happen.

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get my hands on Sky, but it was going to happen.

It really is time that gaming catches up with the 21st century, and breaks down these barriers. I'll be interested to see if *PC ZONE* feels if I have a legitimate point here.

Louis Noble

You do have a point, lead game characters are usually heterosexual white men with guns and giant arms, and it's a shame we don't have a broader range of heroes – not in sexuality, but in gender and race.

Still, BioWare's *Dragon Age* allows you to do the dirty with just about anyone. In *Mass Effect* you were restricted to lovers of the opposite sex, a fact BioWare defended by saying that Shepard's character was straight, and not open to player choice. But if the character's open to interpretation enough to be played by either a man or a woman, surely we all could've had a go on the lizard dude?

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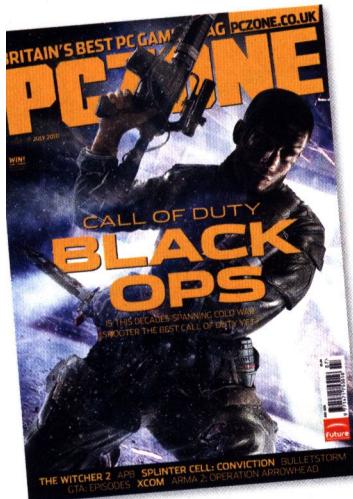
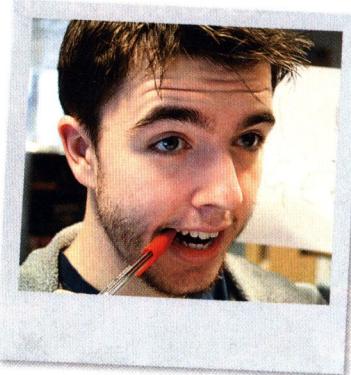
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As I mentioned earlier, I'm a game developer, as well as a gamer. As such I feel I can provide a different view towards the current trend of having more intrusive DRM in gaming.

Think about your job. You know, it's (presumably) 37 and a half hours or more you put into writing *PC ZONE* each week. You release a new copy of your magazine every month. I'm sure you work hard and I hope it's rewarding a fun. Now think about the guys in the games industry you write about – designers, programmers, artists, producers, whatever. Hundreds of these people work hard on a single AAA title for several years. These guys are generally very passionate about what they do, easily work 37.5 hours at a minimum and often do 50-80 hour

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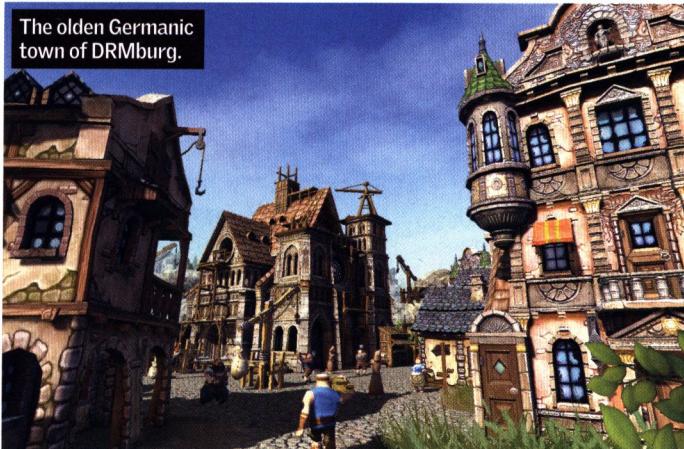
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The olden Germanic town of DRMbburg.



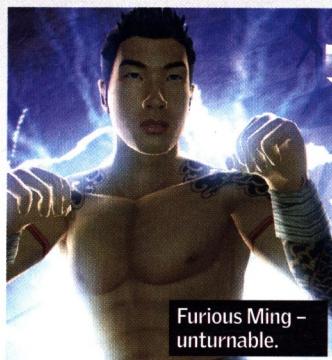
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Dragon Age uses DRM to encourage players to buy it.

"How do you think it feels when you see a torrent of your game?"

weeks for months on end. The money is good but not great, especially these days – there's an economic downturn don't you know!

But there are a few things game developers think about and hope for throughout a game's development. The first is that when it's complete, the game will achieve greatness. Good doesn't cut it. Good will have people saying things like "it was almost a classic, but it was a missed opportunity". Good is hard to boast about to your mates.

The next thing is that review scores are fair.

Then you hope it sells well. This isn't about greed: it's more about wanting your studio to do well, be able to bring in more staff, and have the chance to make more great games.

The fourth thing most game developers look for is recognition. By this I mean that they want to be able to point at the box in the shops and tell

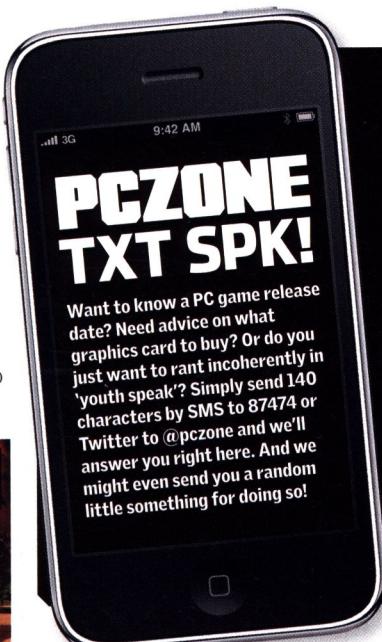
their mates how proud they are to have spent a huge chunk of their life on it.

What I'm trying to make clear here is that most developers put a lot into their work and care about it.

You hear about people losing jobs because of studio closures and redundancies. It's a risky, expensive business, where you're only as good as your last game.

So how do you think it feels when you see a torrent of your game that you put so much effort into? Or when you see figures that show the total number of sales are a quarter that of illegal downloads? Or when the project fails to break even? You're disappointed, saddened and worried.

Think about how you'd feel if 75% of the people that read your magazine did so by downloading PDFs that were distributed freely and illegally online. Not only that, but all the adverts had been removed!



Want to know a PC game release date? Need advice on what graphics card to buy? Or do you just want to rant incoherently in 'youth speak'? Simply send 140 characters by SMS to 87474 or Twitter to @pczone and we'll answer you right here. And we might even send you a random little something for doing so!

Please find attached the world's smallest toilet.
Hannah Dutch

Excellent, we'll just have the world's smallest poo.

Is Red Dead Redemption coming to PC???
Kevin Popular

Rockstar won't confirm this when we asked. But we say, "Yes, definitely, it will. Eventually."

What is PC ZONE's favourite Scandinavian country?
Francis Bacon

David's is Norway, while Steve is a Finland kind of guy.



METRO 2033

Howard D'Arcy
PC ZONE SCORE 80%

Metro 2033 is eastern Europe's answer to *Half-Life 2*, a thrilling and dark adventure that doesn't strictly warrant a comparison to *STALKER*.

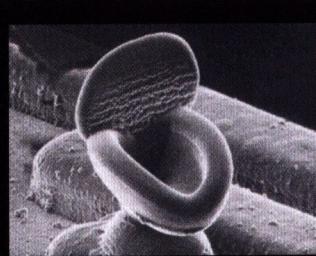
In terms of mood they strike a similar chord, but they're startlingly different games: one almost sandbox like in its open-endedness, ambitious and faulty in many areas, the other is a tightly directed, linear and beautifully produced story.

The combat could be better and the basic mouse control feels weird to begin with (console-skewed Y-axis sensitivity ahoy, urgh), but as a journey through the brain of Dimtry Glukhovsky it can't come more highly recommended.

YOUR SHOUT 81%



Send your reviews with a maximum of 120 words, your name and a score to letters@pczone.co.uk. Every one printed here wins a top PC game.

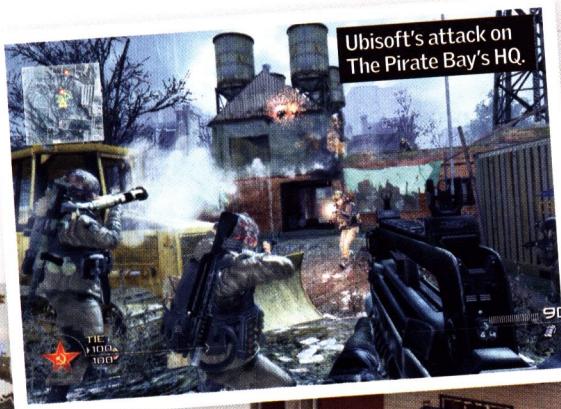


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A visual metaphor: pirates vs publishers.



Ubisoft's attack on
The Pirate Bay's HQ.



Modern Warfare 2
was a torrent hit.



MYSTIC WILL'S SERIAL KILLER

Give me your codes,
I will dispense prophecy

Dear Mystic Will,
Since spying this particular garbled collection of letters and numbers and hyphens, I've found four grey pubes. Here's the kicker: they were on my wife's private parts. What's happening to me?

4KF7-2R35-MKSU-PWE6-BMBO
Alistair Honeyops

I'm getting a strong reading from this one. Towards the middle we clearly see the spirits of the serial key piecing together the words "muck soup", before signing off with "wee bimbo". A disgusting sex act of yours, I expect. How embarrassing that I have outed you in this public forum.

Have you got a mystic serial key you'd like Mystic Will to divine? Then send it in to letters@pczone.co.uk. Readings are guaranteed 100% accurate.

"A huge number of gamers actually prefer to buy a £30-odd game"

With a fair amount of effort, someone had scanned all the pages and made it really easy for people to get what they want. It's easier than going to the shops to pick up a copy. Your company won't make any money and at the end of the day, it won't make you feel good!

So it's really callous to say things like "piracy might just be the thing that revitalises PC gaming and makes it stand out from the console crowd", as though we should be thankful.

You appear to miss the huge attraction to game publishers to release games only on closed console platforms. It's a lot of work and it costs a lot of money to create PC games. It's also rather ironic that you think of boxed DVD games as an archaic medium, given that you're still printing your magazine on paper and offering a free DVD on the cover when most of your competitors are internet based.

Sure, videogame publishers need to realise what the PC games market has

turned into. They need to move to a more incentive-based DRM approach and away from presuming all P2P downloaders are pirates.

I can appreciate the temptation to download a crack for a game that requires an always-on internet connection. But you should also realise that a huge number of gamers actually prefer to buy a £30-odd game from the shops or online, where they know exactly what they're getting: a high-quality game of good length and a fair amount of replayability. Small games with lots of paid-for DLC and online content doesn't work for every title, and may not produce the same meaty experience required for some genres.

I would love publishers to experiment more with shareware distribution models, live online content and to offset a lot of the cost to the consumer with in-game advertising. We're making steps toward this but it's a slow and expensive process, and a lot of mistakes have to be made first.

I believe an always-on internet connection will become a standard

requirement for most games. Steam was only the beginning of this and other companies should use this as a template for their distribution.

So anyway, my main point here is that you shouldn't be so hard on videogame makers. We're trying to make awesome games for all of you to enjoy, and at the same time make a bit of money and keep a sustainable business. This is tough to achieve and many have failed already. Only a crazy person would start a business in the games industry.

Lee,
Developer, AAA videogame studio

Agree? Disagree? Apathetic? Fling your thoughts at pczone.co.uk, where the debate will continue...

PCZONE



AROUND THE WORLD



We want photos of you with PC ZONE in the most exotic or inappropriate locations. Candid celeb shots count double. Every one printed wins a prize!



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"*StarCraft II* is going single-player"

COVER STORY

STARCRAFT II



DURING THE MANY thousands of hours players have sunk into the *StarCraft II* multiplayer beta, Blizzard seem to have come to the conclusion, after analysing all the data, that the best thing about the game is, in fact, the single-player game. You could almost say *StarCraft II*, apart from the elite Korean keyboard gymnasts, will be going single-player. The evidence seems to point to the solo modes as being the choice for discerning RTS enthusiasts who can't memorise and then implement 1,000 macro commands in 10 seconds. Find out more about this fascinating development in our bumper 12-page blowout...

PAGE

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UPFRONT

Everything that matters in the world of PC gaming



JUST DESSERTS

Steve Hogarty

GAMBLING IN GAMES is brilliant, consequence-free fun. If there's one thing games excel at, it's taking something that typically carries huge consequences (say, killing a man or a dog) and bleaching those consequences into a nothing-y white residue.

Menopausal critics claim that games should show the results of our actions, to teach children important lessons about life and piling pennies into machines with flashing lights and kaching-kaching noises. But where's the fun in that? The reason games are fun is because a part of our brain flushes our faces with relief-endorphins upon realising that what's in front of us isn't real, and that the police won't come and arrest us for getting out cocks out in *Saints Row 2*, and debtors won't come around to break our legs after a bad casino run in *Fallout: New Vegas*.

And when in-game consequences do occur – when the virtual police show up and virtual debtor arrives – you can simply murder your way out of any problem you're in. Shoot the consequences until they're dead, eventually the game throws up its hands like a tired parent and refuses to try and punish you any more.

The alternative is for your violent attempts to extricate yourself from the meandering course of justice to result in a spiral of guilt, a sustained response from the authorities who eventually threaten you through your monitor before they Alt-F4 the game and delete critical files. Is boot.ini still one of those? And whatever happened to autoexec.bat?

STOP PRESS!

ASS TO MOUTH

After the film *Human Centipede* there's now *Human Centipede: The Game*. Naked people crawl, cops flit, and you shoot the lot of them.



"Flame on buddy!"

BRIDGE BUILDING

The gap between *Mass Effect 2* and its sequel will be bridged by DLC, says BioWare producer Casey Hudson. The first, *Overlord*, comes out this month.

BIG DIPPER

It seems that, unless it's a big (or little) hoax, somebody wants to make a film based on *RollerCoaster Tycoon*. Will it be an action thriller or a children's adventure?

A MAN OF WORDS

Undead porn writer puts pen to paper for *Bulletstorm*

DEVELOPER People Can Fly/Epic PUBLISHER EA
WEBSITE bulletstorm.com ETA 2011

MARK MORRIS, EXECUTIVE producer of *Bulletstorm*, is excited by the prospect of people kicking grunts to death in the upcoming blood-and-thunder FPS from Painkiller developers People Can Fly and Epic.

He's also excited about the fellow whose come to add words the bits inbetween the violence: a bloke better known for adding words inbetween violence in comics.

Q Is *Bulletstorm*'s story really being penned by a Marvel Comics writer?

A Yeah, his name is Rick Remender (rickremender.com). He's an interesting guy and is known for a book called *XXXombies* which is zombie porn! [He also wrote *Dead Space*, alongside fellow comic scribes Warren Ellis and Antony Johnston] It's tongue-in-cheek



Mark Morris
Exec producer, *Bulletstorm*



Rick Remender
Writer, *Bulletstorm*

stuff. It's been great working with him, he's got a great reputation in the comic book world. He's really making a name for himself.

Was Remender brought in after the project started, to sculpt the story out of what was already there?

He was there pretty close to the beginning. Initially the team wrote the story, but we felt that we needed someone to take it to the next level.

Between the characters there's a particular vibe that he's captured. He's got the same sensibility as Adrian Chmielarz (Creative Director, People Can Fly), and Cliff Bleszinski (Epic) was really keen on Rick and thought he was perfect.

Did Remender bring any ideas to the gameplay himself?

Can't think of anything specific, but I know he's indirectly



influenced a lot of it through his writing, and he's of course put his name to the skill shots.

The main character seems a bit misogynistic. Is this deliberate? Will people feel uncomfortable with it?

Gray's a total anti-hero, old school, un-PC, the guy you'd want to go drinking with, but would never introduce to your sister or mum, as he'd say something to embarrass you. He's an interesting dramatic character, but he's OTT, just like the gameplay.



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BRINK

See what's new with the monkey-armed boys.

54

FALLOUT: NEW VEGAS

Gambling and dinosaurs. How cool is that?



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STARCRAFT II

Your guide to what's going to be the biggest sequel of 2010.

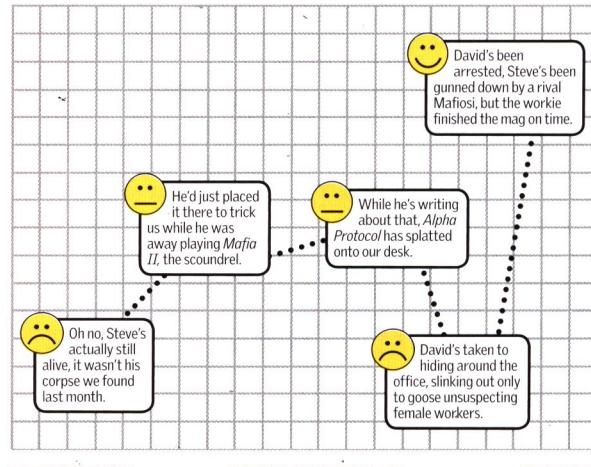


XXXombies. The undead have never been sexier.

"Rick Remender's known for a book called *XXXombies*, which is zombie porn"



STUFF
A therapist in the UK has claimed that playing games for two hours is the same as packing your nostrils full of white powder. Steve Pope, brain mender, claimed in the *Lancashire Evening Post* that a line of cocaine gives an equivalent high to playing a game for just two hours. He clearly hasn't played *Woodcutter Simulator* or he'd realise that there's no possible way for anyone to ever feel high after trying to chop down a tree, unsuccessfully, for two hours.

**LIFE IS A ROLLER COASTER**

PLAY BEFORE PAY

Pavel Barter asks if the days of game demos are numbered

GAME DEMOS ARE about whetting the appetite, some say. If that's true, then *Just Cause 2*'s was an all-you-can-eat buffet. You got to gorge on 35 square miles of the Lautan Lama Desert for a joyous 30 minutes at time.

Over two million copies of the demo were downloaded, resulting in 2.5 million headshots and a million drivers kicked from vehicles, according to the developer's stats. Someone even made a mod for the demo.

For the game's creators, delivering this wasn't a piece of cake – the devs

started work on the demo five months before the game's launch.

"A demo the size and complexity of *Just Cause 2*'s is a major investment and a separate release in its own right, with its own budget, project plan, and commercial targets," says Chris Dillon, *Just Cause 2* producer at Square Enix London Studios.

"Investing resources and time to develop the demo is just the start. On top of that are focus group studies, where we test builds to see how players react to our design decisions. Demos also need to go through the same localisation and quality assessment processes as the main game."

Just Cause 2's demo was as ludicrously ambitious as the finished product. It paid off too, as the game went on to chart success. Yet some developers have been questioning the merit of demos. Cevat Yerli, Crytek's CEO, has called them obsolete and prohibitively expensive. AAA-titles like

Modern Warfare 2 and *Gears of War* didn't have demos, and Rockstar rarely release them.

"I think demos are necessary for a new

intellectual property, I'm not sure they are for a sequel," says videogame analyst Michael Pachter.

"*FIFA 11*: do you really care? You've played *FIFA* before, you understand the concept. It's a good way to generate buzz but occasionally demos destroy the game. It's a double-edged sword. If the demo is amazing – and people say it's the best thing they've ever played – then it helps."

Or does it? In 2008, America's Electronic Entertainment Design and Research (EEDAR) surveyed games released on the Xbox 360 and PlayStation 3, and found those with the biggest sales had no demos. Geoffrey Zatkin, president and COO of EEDAR, reckons the trend is much the same for PC titles.

"Demos are hard to make because you're being asked to provide a working version of a game before it's finished," he says. "In practice, people that could be finishing the game are pulled off development to make the demo. This usually involves kludging code and art, most of which has to be ripped out later to do it properly."



The new *AvP*'s demo was hated.

"Trailers are powerful because they are considerably cheaper to produce and are guaranteed to show the game experience you want. Almost any game can be made to look exciting in a trailer. Not every demo will be exciting when played."

TRY BEFORE YOU BUY

So an underwhelming demo can harm a game's reputation. The *Aliens vs Predator* demo was lambasted for being multiplayer only, *Bionic Commando*'s deathmatch demo baffled players thanks to it lacking a tutorial, while *Bad Company 2*'s demo angered some before it even began, after EA asked players for their email address.

EA, meanwhile, are reportedly planning to charge for longer demos, or "premium downloadable content" (PDLC) as their marketing people label them. "I think most consumers will balk at spending money on a game demo," says Zatkin. "This might work for high-profile projects – the next *Halo*, *StarCraft*, *Call of Duty* etc – but for a majority of the industry, it's hard to get people to pay to look at your promotional material."

"That said, we might see a lot more short games coming out with an episodic business model. This would allow publishers to sell a portion of the game at a lower price point and, if there is consumer interest, fund the next few chapters of the story and see if people continue to buy it."



Just Cause 2: demotastic.

"Just Cause 2's demo was as ambitious as the finished product"



"Demos use clever tactics to make you commit to a full purchase"

EA claim their PDLC will be a large portion of a game, as opposed to a traditional demo – a concept that is hardly new. In the early '90s, 3D Realms and id Software pioneered shareware, in which you could get a chunk of a game for free before buying the full product. The shareware version of *Doom - Knee-Deep in the Dead* – came with nine levels, while in recent times *Portal's* aperitif featured 11 of the game's levels.

Rather than charging, other demos use clever tactics to make you commit to a full purchase. Some indie games let you play for an hour, then charge for unlocking the rest of the game; *Dragon Age: Origins* released a character creator demo that hooked up with the

purchased game. The most effective demos, say Zatkin, are all about timing.

"EEDAR has been recommending, for some time, that publishers and developers should consider releasing a demo post-release," he says. "Making a demo for a finished game is much easier to do. Time that would have been spent making the demo can be spent making the game better: more polish, more bug fixes, more features, etc. The quality of a demo made from the finished game is almost always higher than the quality of a demo made from an incomplete game." A tuned *BioShock* demo, for example, was released a few days before the game and broke records for demo downloads.

Is there anything you want PC ZONE to investigate? (Warning: some jobs might be considered too big or too small...)

✉ letters@pczone.co.uk
✉ Special Report, PC ZONE,
2 Balcombe St, London, NW1 6NW

A BIT OF WHAT YOU FANCY

Picking apart the best PC game demos

HALF-LIFE (1998)

The debut of gaming's greatest futuristic dystopian potboiler tickled our interest with *Half-Life: Day One*, a demo that contained a fifth of the entire game. A second demo, *Half-Life: Uplink*, was the holy grail. While some demos contain material not found in the finished product – the *Age of Empires* demo, for example, included two unreleased maps and a unique campaign – *Uplink*, set 48 hours into the story, consisted of cut material and revised levels.



PREY (2006)

Size matters when it comes to demos. *Deus Ex* released its first few levels for free, and *Batman: Arkham Asylum* had a director's cut of the first hour of the game. But when a demo is too long, sometimes you can't be arsed buying the finished product. In its sampler for *Prey*, 3D Realms dished up a massive chunk of gameplay: from the first level to when the Native American protagonist, out to rescue his missus from alien bastards, gains immortality.



STRANGLEHOLD (2007)

Like a taste of caviar before a gallon of fish eggs, some demos are better than the game that follows. John Woo's *Stranglehold* made a bang with a demo that saw you slo-mo sniping, waving golden guns, and sliding around on carts like a drunk milkman. The full game, however, bored to tears with a melodramatic story and countless waves of enemies.



JUST CAUSE 2 (2010)

Making a demo for an open world sandbox isn't easy, but the boffins behind *Just Cause 2*, took the task in hand.

"We wanted to capture the total freedom offered by the main game while still providing enough structure and handholding so players wouldn't be totally lost or confused," says Chris Dillon, producer at Square Enix. "We tackled this by adding a special zone at the start that allowed players to get used to the controls and world logic before being thrown into the action."

As for the choice of locale: "Every part of the demo ended up being discussed in great depth. The decision to locate the demo within a region of the desert was made for several reasons. It was one of our newly introduced climate zones, so we wanted players to experience the advances we had made in the environments."

Despite Cevat Yerli's predictions, demos aren't going away any time soon. Programmer Chad Walker, veteran of titles such as *Age of Empires II* and author of the book *Making a Game Demo: From Concept to Demo Gold*, says demos are crucial for industry events like E3, for marking development milestones, testing betas, and much more. Yerli views *Modern Warfare 2*'s lack of demo as the exception, not as the rule.

"I believe there is now more of a need for demos than ever," he says.

Call of Duty first came out in 2003 and up until now has released 10 titles, with seven years of marketing, community growth and expansion. Also, if you look back on previous *Call of Duty* releases, they had their fair share of demos to get the public interested and accepting of the game. Their latest non-demo release was just as much about marketing hype as releasing a demo.

"Remember, they didn't need to raise awareness, grow a community or push a new IP through. They simply needed to meet and exceed expectations."

PCZONE Charts

Official data compiled by
GfK ChartTrack

- 1 **BATTLEFIELD: BAD COMPANY 2**
Issue 220 - 84%
- 2 **FOOTBALL MANAGER 2010**
Issue 214 - 88%
- 3 **THE SIMS 3**
Issue 208 - 92%
- 4 **THE SIMS 3: WORLD ADVENTURES**
Issue 215 - 78%
- 5 **WORLD OF WARCRAFT: WRATH OF LICH KING**
Issue 202 - 86%
- 6 **COMMAND & CONQUER 4: TIBERIAN TWILIGHT**
Issue 220 - 60%
- 7 **SUPREME COMMANDER 2**
Issue 219 - 80%
- 8 **RE BIOSHOCK 2**
Issue 218 - 92%
- 9 **DAWN OF WAR II: CHAOS RISING**
Issue 220 - 90%
- 10 **MODERN WARFARE 2**
Issue 215 - 95%
- 11 **JUST CAUSE 2**
Issue 220 - 84%
- 12 **EMPIRE: TOTAL WAR**
Issue 206 - 78%
- 13 **MASS EFFECT 2**
Issue 218 - 93%
- 14 **ASSASSIN'S CREED II**
Issue 219 - 90%
- 15 **GTA: EPISODES FROM LIBERTY CITY**
Issue 221 - 86%
- 16 **DRAGON AGE: ORIGINS - AWAKENING**
Issue 220 - 79%
- 17 **RE LEFT 4 DEAD 2**
Issue 215 - 94%
- 18 **NEW TOM CLANCY'S SPLINTER CELL: CONVICTION**
Issue 221 - 84%
- 19 **THE SETTLERS 7: PATHS TO A KINGDOM**
Issue 220 - 74%
- 20 **METRO 2033**
Issue 220 - 80%



1. BATTLEFIELD: BAD COMPANY 2

Right now, EA are chanting "Na-nah-na-nah-na!" at Activision.



7. SUPREME COMMANDER 2

Strategic big stompy robots don't get more strategic, big or stompy than this lot.



10. MODERN WARFARE 2

Ironically, "10" is also the number of staff currently left at Infinity Ward. *rim-shot*



11. JUST CAUSE 2

Use a grappling hook and rope to drag men towards you. Make your own joke out of that.

KING OF SPAIN

Napoleon expands into sun-kissed Peninsular Campaign goodness

WEBSITE totalwar.com/napoleon

HE MIGHT HAVE lost it in the freezing wastes of Russia, with his soldiers taking cover inside the hollowed out corpses of their horses, but at least when he came a cropper in Spain it was warm and sunny. No makeshift frozen animal flesh houses for the Armee d'Espagne.

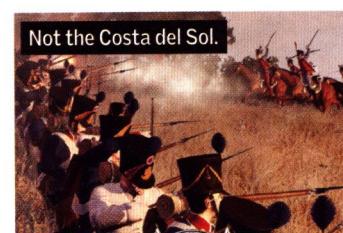
What this means for *Napoleon: Total War*'s first major expansion is that you'll get *The Peninsular Campaign* to play about in. The year is 1811, two years after fighting broke out between the French, their treacherous allies, and a varied number of Portuguese, loyal Spaniards and Brits (after all, we pretty much took part in every fight in the world at that time. Like olden day football supporters.).



The British get everywhere.

The campaign itself has 32 controllable regions and four different factions, including a newcomer to *Napoleon: Total War*, Spain. Populating these sun-tanned lands will be three new agents: the Priest (Spain and Portugal), the Provocateur (Britain and France) and the Spanish-exclusive Guerillero (a guerilla fighter).

An interesting minor little feature that'll also be included is a Political Alignment system, which is all about the French trying to increase the 'love' amongst Spaniards for their occupation. This'll probably pan out a bit like the Priests converting heathen lands to their own brand of propaganda, but it could be more interesting than that. Watch this space, folks.



DOUBLE IMPACT

Alien Breed remake comes to PCs

WEBSITE team17.com

THOSE SLIMY CONSOLE types have had the chance to play *Alien Breed Evolution* for a long time now, even if their version was disappointing and featured a terrible co-op mode (a remarkable achievement, as co-op gameplay is almost always inherently brilliant fun) but Team 17 have promised that the summer release of the former Xbox Live-exclusive game will be much better.

It'll be called *Alien Breed: Impact* now, because *Impact* sounds more energetic and thrusting than *Evolution*, and as you know, every game in the world has to be "name-colon-name" nowadays. It'll also be "tougher and require more individual exploration than its predecessor".

One of the major selling points is that there'll be more customisability and upgrades for weapons. But that's not all: the co-op game will be given a right



You're doing Ripley proud.

proper kick in the cojones to make it more palatable to, well, anyone, plus there'll be a prologue campaign to ease you into the world of *Alien Breed*, should be unfamiliar with it.

This all sounds promising enough, with the words being thrown about improvements, enhancements and that sort of thing, and even now we have a soft spot for the original.

However, the lacklustre nature of *Evolution* on the gogglebox machines makes us bite our tongues when declaring ourselves actually excited.

JARED GERRITZEN
PROJECT LEAD, IGNITION GAMES

WE HAVE IGNITION

Just one of many men behind FPS *Blacklight: Tango Down* As our Qs

THE PUBLIC'S APPETITE for first-person shooters will never be satiated. At least not according to Ignition Games, who have the future-modern *Blacklight: Tango Down* all poised for a summer release. It's download-only, priced at just over a £10 and has the same production values as, their words, "an AAA standard" game, but is our bloated FPS snack hole already crammed to bursting point? What makes it different to the norm?

Q *Blacklight*'s not just competitive multiplayer, is it? You've also got a co-op mode.

A Yeah, we called it 'Black Ops' before that damn game got announced! I always say it's because they're such a big fan of ours that they're naming their whole game after one of our modes. Maybe they'll get some street cred finally, but yeah, it's our mode.

You play four different operations with the Black Op team, or the Black

Light team, against The Order – the enemy team. We've also added a faction that aren't seen in the multiplayer, the Civs, who are the population of the city that's been infected by this kind of rage virus. They're pretty much zombies that know how to fire machine guns, like the next evolution of zombies.

What's the rationale behind the 'legalised wall hack' view mode?

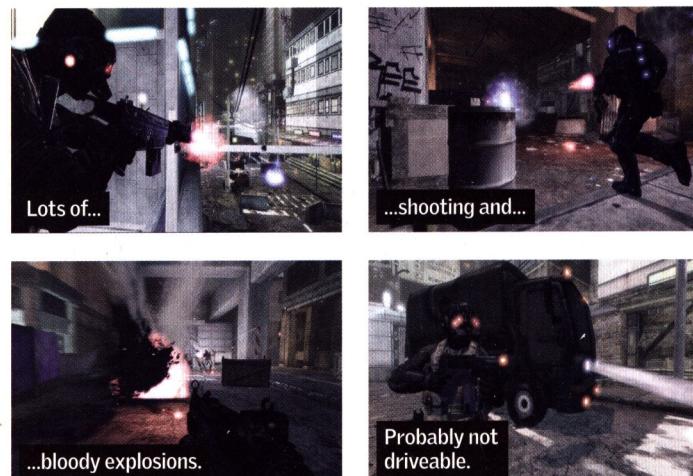
We were on the fence for a while on it and even I was questioning it, but after a few solid hardcore play-tests, it made the game go so much faster. And that's what we really want, the speed. It really kills some of the crappy behaviour: there's less camping, less spawn area decimation. It adds balance to what is a chaotic game.

Is it something you just have to get used to?

The idea's that it's CCTV and cell phones and webcams parsing information and throwing it at your onboard computer, so it makes sense in a way. Yeah, some



Gerritzen, thinking about video games, probably.



people will hate it, but some will love it and might even start pressing that button when they're playing other shooters and missing it. It's a gamble, but it's totally worth it because of the gameplay that it adds.

You're not going to have dedicated servers. How come?

Some games that have had dedicated servers for the past six games and then decided to not have them, for example *Modern Warfare 2*.

They'll have them in the next one.

I wonder if they're also going to charge \$15 for five maps on the next one. Hmm, weird. Anyway, we didn't do dedicated servers because we have *Games for Windows - LIVE* for the PC. We really didn't want to do a different interface on all three platforms, so we kept everything uniform. It was mainly for the ease of development for the project.

We're not a company that's making our sixth game and has a couple of

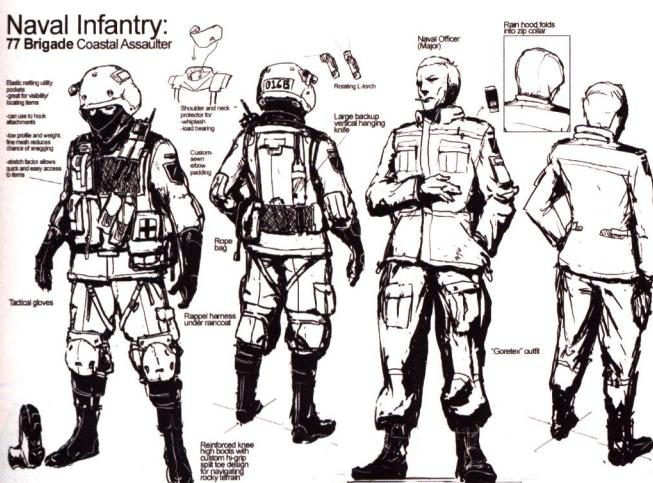
hundred employees working on it, so we needed to do the best for the project as well as us. That's why dedicated servers aren't seen in this version of the game. If the fans definitely ask for it, we'll try to get what people want for any other products we work on in the future.

Do you anticipate any latency or lag issues?

We're combating this in a number of ways. I actually played against the Ignition team in London while I was in Seattle and I was surprised by the lack of any real latency issues.

I believe that when you're playing it and you want to get a quick fix, but you can't find a good server; we have the Black Ops missions, so people can still play it.

Games for Windows - LIVE has really been helping pull the correct people to you, so the latency issues shouldn't be a problem. We're still testing and fixing things as much as possible; of course. **PCZ**



"We called it 'Black Ops' before that damn game got announced!"

Incoming

How you'll be wasting your money in 2010

SOMETIMES WHEN COMPILED this list, it's easy to get disillusioned. Do we include *Ghost Whisperer: Shadowlands* or *John Daly's ProStroke Golf*? Such tough decisions are there to be made and sometimes valuable titles fall by the wayside. Or, in that specific case, no valuable titles do.

We try to keep the titles in this list as exciting as possible, but naturally there's only so much of a thrill ride one can take. This is why we balance the likes of *Mafia II* with games like *Spellforce 2* – they're the chill out zones of the Incoming section. These dates were correct as of going to press, so if they change, don't go calling us and shouting abuse down the phone.

APB

What would you expect the PC ZONE team to create given APB's ludicrously extensive customisation suite? That's right, a big old cock and balls to be plastered over game's world. Sadly, this is all in our mind (at the moment) but you can be sure there will be a box out with said image when we review it. Certainly if Log is the one who writes it. It won't be just for childish laughs though. APB's in-game currency can be earned by creating designs others might like, so our hairy scrotum and

phallus combo might soar to the top of the purchase charts if other like-minded individuals want to decorate their games with it. Here's hoping.



KANE & LYNCH 2: DOG DAYS

The temptation to call this *Kane & Lynch 2: Salad Days* is ever-present, but sadly the game doesn't have anything to do with Shakespeare, youthful, innocent exuberance or even having your head sliced off by a piano keyboard. But it is a chance for IO to redeem a binliner of broken promises and make the exhilarating gangster thriller the first *K&L* was supposed to be, set up by a jerky handheld camera and the exciting backdrop of Shanghai. *Dog Days* has got a snap-to-cover system and

a whole host of other console conventions, but there are enough good ideas here to keep us in the partially erect section of the excite-o-meter.



GAME

PUBLISHER

ETA

SWORD OF THE STARS COMPLETE	PARADOX	18 JUNE
TRANSFORMERS: WAR FOR CYBERTRON	ACTIVISION	22 JUNE
LEGO HARRY POTTER: YEARS 1-4	WARNER BROS.	25 JUNE
SINGULARITY	ACTIVISION	29 JUNE
APB	REALTIME WORLDS	2 JULY
STARCRAFT II: WINGS OF LIBERTY	BLIZZARD	27 JULY
KANE & LYNCH 2: DOG DAYS	EIDOS	27 AUGUST
MAFIA II	2K GAMES	27 AUGUST
THE PATRICIAN IV	KALYPSO MEDIA	27 AUGUST
SHIP SIMULATOR 2010: EXTREMES	PARADOX	27 AUGUST
SPELLFORCE 2: FAITH IN DESTINY	JOWOOD	27 AUGUST
MONKEY ISLAND 2: LECHUCK'S REVENGE SE	LUCASARTS	SUMMER 2010
DEAD RISING 2	CAPCOM	3 SEPTEMBER
R.U.S.E.	UBISOFT	3 SEPTEMBER
TWO WORLDS: THE TEMPTATION	ZUXXEZ	17 SEPTEMBER

AHEAD OF THE GAME

Take heed readers – this is how excited we are over the biggest games that are coming out of the next 12 months.

ANTICIPATION LEVEL



CIVILIZATION V	2K GAMES	24 SEPTEMBER
DC UNIVERSE ONLINE	SONY ONLINE	24 SEPTEMBER
F1 2010	CODEMASTERS	SEPTEMBER
MEDAL OF HONOR	EA	12 OCTOBER
FALLOUT: NEW VEGAS	BETHESDA	29 OCTOBER
ARCANIA: GOTHIC 4	JOWOOD	AUTUMN 2010
BRINK	BETHESDA	AUTUMN 2010
FABLE III	MICROSOFT	AUTUMN 2010
F.E.A.R. 3	WARNER	AUTUMN 2010
TRON: EVOLUTION	DISNEY	1 NOVEMBER
RAGE	BETHESDA	12 NOVEMBER
STORM OF WAR	UBISOFT	NOVEMBER 2010
ASSASSIN'S CREED: BROTHERHOOD	UBISOFT	WINTER 2010
CRYYSIS 2	EA	WINTER 2010
GHOST RECON: FUTURE SOLDIER	UBISOFT	WINTER 2010
HITMAN 5	SQUARE ENIX	WINTER 2010
MAX PAYNE 3	ROCKSTAR	WINTER 2010
NEED FOR SPEED: WORLD	EA	WINTER 2010
STARCRAFT II: HEART OF THE SWARM	BLIZZARD	WINTER 2010
STARCRAFT II: LEGACY OF THE VOICE	BLIZZARD	WINTER 2010
TEST DRIVE UNLIMITED 2	NAMCO BANDAI	WINTER 2010
WORLD OF WARCRAFT: CATAclysm	ACTIVISION	WINTER 2010
THE AGENCY: COVERT OPS	SOE	TBA 2010
ALIENS: COLONIAL MARINES	SEGA	TBA 2010
BATMAN: ARKHAM ASYLUM 2	WARNER BROS	TBA 2010
CARRIER COMMAND: GAEA MISSION	BOHEMIA	TBA 2010
DEUS EX: HUMAN REVOLUTION	EIDOS	TBA 2010
HALF-LIFE 2: EPISODE THREE	VALVE	TBA 2010
HOMEFRONT	THQ	TBA 2010
SERIOUS SAM 3	GOD GAMES	TBA 2010
SPEC OPS: THE LINE	2K GAMES	TBA 2010
THIEF 4	EIDOS	TBA 2010

THE AGENCY: COVERT OPS

For a game with a title referencing a singular organisation, players starting out in *The Agency* will be able to join one of two agencies. One is full of elite



secret agents and goes by the name UNITE and the other is a big private army called ParaGON. The latter is of particular interest because they seem to be the closest you'll get to being an MMO MacGyver, with a focus on hand-made explosives and ingenious use of materials. So crafting's going to be big, it seems. UNITE operative will be your traditional sneaky pseudo-ninjas, both sides fighting in a skill-based MMO that really needs to keep us up-to-date with how it's coming along.

WARHAMMER 40,000: THE MMO

You know, we're actually very excited about this, even though we still don't know anything about it, other than the obvious. Will it be breaking new ground



and moving the genre forward or will it be a generic grinder game where people get so bored they sear their faces off with a plasma cannon? If we're being realistic, it'll be the latter, but surprises do happen. All we ask is that the combat doesn't involve clicking little icons and watching your guy go pew-pew with a little pistol for the first 20 hours. This could be one of the biggest things in MMOs for a long time, so let's hope "adventure" rather than "compromise" is the byword for its developers.

XCOM	PARADOX	TBA 2010
DEAD SPACE 2	EA	EARLY 2011
THE SECRET WORLD	FUNCOM	EARLY 2011
LORD OF THE RINGS: WAR IN THE NORTH	DISNEY	SPRING 2011
THE WITCHER 2	NAMCO BANDAI	SPRING 2011
STAR WARS: THE OLD REPUBLIC	LUCASARTS	AUTUMN 2011
BEYOND GOOD & EVIL 2	UBISOFT	TBA 2011
BULLETSTORM	EA	TBA 2011
CALL OF DUTY: BLACK OPS	ACTIVISION	TBA 2011
DIABLO III	ACTIVISION	TBA 2011
METAL GEAR SOLID: RISING	KONAMI	TBA 2011
WARHAMMER 40,000: THE MMO	THQ	TBA 2012



JON 'LOG' BLYTH...

THE PERFECT GAME



When you're rating a game out of 100, it's a given that no game will get that score. Some people say that's because no game is perfect. Others say the percentage scale is logarithmic at the tips, but they're just trying to sound clever as there's a girl nearby. The truth is there isn't room for three numbers in the score box, and the art guys hate it when you screw with their templates.

They're already grumpy about not getting to go on trips to E3, so when you muck about with their templates they hoist their dresses up hip level and scream. In fact, knowing how petty those art guys can be, I bet they've read this, got pissy, and mutilated my face in *Photoshop*.

I've always wanted to give a game 100, but there's no game worth it. This gives me two options: award the perfect score to a game that doesn't deserve it, or make my own game that's perfect in every way. Let's go.

TITLE

The name has to have a sense of authority, but it also has to be playful. It's got to speak to the hardcore, but stick in the mind of the newcomer. So, I'm calling my game *Sergeant Bum Puppy Extreme*. On the box, *Extreme* will look like it's been stamped, as though a man from the BBFC was so offended by the nature of the content that he walked into the warehouse and personally stamped every box.

PLOT

The temptation when writing your storyline is to hold something back. This will not happen in my game. You are Jack Keppler, a member of the SAS who can stop time, possess people, fly, and shoot his fingernails at 50 miles an hour. You were killed in action seven years ago, and are now being operated by Ruby Venezuela, the ghost of a transvestite P.I. who was shot by the Mafia for getting too close to the truth. She provides a ceaseless, unflinchingly raunchy monologue throughout your adventure.

CONTROVERSY

To make the game edgy, Jack's post-death testicles produce a constant build-up of flesh-eating bacteria. You can only learn this in a series of drawn-out, explicit cutscenes.

To this end, the TV advert will see Jack wanking into a pram. Cut to the inside of the pram, and you see with a tweak of horror that inside is a baby's skeleton. Beat that, Rockstar, you pussies.

SCRIPT

A bad script can ruin a great game, so my script will be the very best script there has ever been. But don't take my word for it, here's a scene:

If you want to enter into a debate with this professional opinion slayer, you can contact Log by the methods below.

@ letters@pczone.co.uk
✉ Mr Log, PC ZONE, 2 Balcombe St, London, NW1 6NW



"Knowing how petty art guys can be, I bet they've mutilated my face"

Corporal Tony Hatch: "Are you mad, Keppler? We can't just punch the meteor away. My top scientists say that you'd need to be extraordinarily muscley to pull off shit that outstanding!"

Keppler: "Extraordinarily muscley... like THIS?"

Corporal: "Maureen, get us a taxi, we've got meteors to fuck up with our fists."

In this scene Umpopo McGann, a voodoo priest, has given Ruby the tranny-ghost power to exist for six minutes in a mirror dimension, where she has to collect 100 lipsticks to increase her maximum sassiness. This will make future monologues even muckier and pitched an octave higher. And there is an achievement for it.

Umpopo: "That is one great lady you got there Jack Keppler."

Keppler: "I wish we had separate bodies, I really want to kiss her."

Umpopo: "Hang on, this is like *Dark Messiah*, we should change this."

MUSIC

Music provides an all-important atmosphere to a game. So They Might Be Giant's '90s classic, *Birdhouse In Your Soul*, will play on a constant loop.

SAMPLE GAMEPLAY

It's a cover-based shooter with bullet time, if I'm being honest. But there's a bit where you get into a helicopter. And maybe a bit in space. **PCZ**

Even skeletons like jailbait Elf cleavage.

ETA
WINTER
2010

DEATHTRAPPED DUNGEONS...

HUNTED: THE DEMON'S FORGE

Will Porter needs little encouragement to get into some co-operative fantasy roleplay

DEVELOPER InXile Entertainment PUBLISHER Bethesda WEBSITE bit.ly/inxile_hunted

THIS IS THE GAME that's updating the dungeon crawl for the *Gears of War* generation: a co-op fantasy carve-em-up with all the grimy walls, blood spray, side (top and bottom) boobs, and third-person cover that a young boy could wish for.

Worried that the travails of Elara, the sexy elf, and Caddoc, the spider-fearing warrior, suggest that *Hunted: The Demon's Forge* is just a set-piece laden, linear testosterone machine, developers inXile have been going to great pains to show off what happens when the players take a trip off the beaten track.

THE LOWDOWN

- ✓ Two-player co-op
- ✓ Back-to-basic dungeon engineering
- ✓ Side-quests
- ✗ Tolkien tropes
- ✗ More slasher than RPG

On one hand there are huge battles along the main quest where co-op scrapping will save the day. For a start, there's the fallout that occurs after Elara greedily touches a glowing green skull, despite the warnings from an off-screen voice oddly reminiscent of *The Thing Upstairs* from *The Trap Door*.

DEM BONES

Pillars collapse, crevasses open and a legion of pure Harryhausen skeletons emerge from the soil. Caddoc and Elara must deal with the boney threat, while taking out the gargoyles summoning them and the skeletal warrior exploding the earth around them with a ballista.

This shows off how *Hunted*'s co-op play will work, with Caddoc charging Elara with an electricity spell to make her arrows more effective against the armoured explosive chucker, and later fending off the horde while she tries to shoot a rope to drop an escape platform into the danger zone.



All the time, context-sensitive dialogue between the two players will reflect events in the battle giving an indication of what to do next, and who's the strongest part of the team.

But what of the off-piste activities? inXile showed us how a Deathstone could read dead bodies to collect messages, riddles and hints of what is to come or lead Elara and Caddoc off in pursuit of magical axes and puzzles.

Otherwise, doing something as simple as investigating a statue can unveil pitch-black dungeon complexes to stalk through, with little but a burning arrow to light your way. Here combat is eschewed in favour of spooky environments, *Zelda*-esque fire-lighting and water-draining puzzles. The message is clear: dungeon crawling isn't just about slow-motion decapitations.

Simplified it may be, but *Hunted* is looking to be more of a true role-playing adventure than we first gave it credit for being. **PCZ**

THE STORY SO FAR... INXILE ENTERTAINMENT

FOUNDED
Brian Fargo begins pitching snark-laden RPG *The Bard's Tale*.
2002



INXILE
entertainment

NAMED
Pitches go bad. Fargo says he feels "in exile" – hence the name.
2003

2003

EXILED
The Bard's Tale arrives on PCs. It was very far from being great.
2005

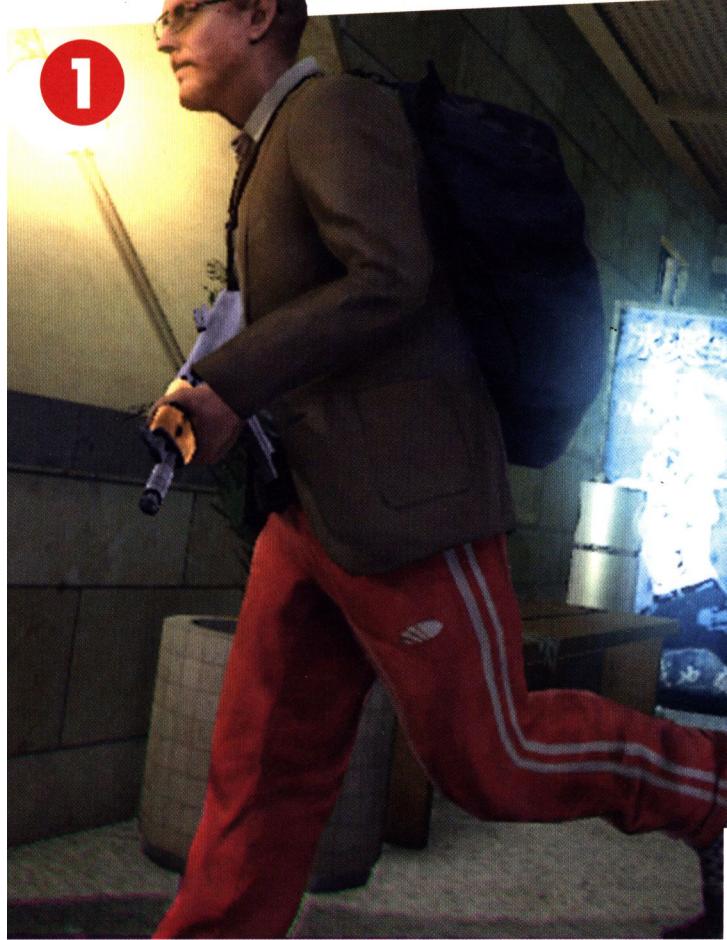


HUNTED
Fargo tells the world about his new snark-less co-op RPG.
2010

2010

UPFRONT HOTSHOTS

1



3



2



KANE & LYNCH 2: DOG DAYS - MULTIPLAYER

DEVELOPER IO Interactive PUBLISHER Square Enix WEBSITE kaneandlynch.com ETA 27 August

THE BEST THING about the original *Kane & Lynch* was the multiplayer game, Fragile Alliance. It was a great idea – stick a bunch of treacherous psychotics in a *Heat*-style bank raid – that was let down by a mediocre single-player game that put people off ever venturing online.

Those few who did try out Fragile Alliance were more than likely to love it and there was even a representative of the fanboy (or in this case, fangirl) community at the swanky London pub Square Enix were demonstrating the multiplayer component of the sequel in.

Naturally, your proud and honest PC ZONE representatives easily defeated the assembled competition, even while scribbling notes down on an abused notepad at the same time.

We learned some things, compiled them into bullet point form, and have presented them to you here.

THE BIGGER PICTURE

1. FRAGILE ALLIANCE

Up to eight players can team up to search for the riches contained in the level. Pleasingly, each character has a comedy accent, making in-mission dialogue amusingly diverting. As you can see, one even has a rancid red tracksuit bottoms/tweed jacket combo, which is hardly inconspicuous heist garb. The less said about the leather-jacketed guy, the better, and the one behind Tracksuit Jim seems to be wearing plus-fours. Perhaps sartorial elegance isn't important when you ransack fish markets for a living.



2. MONEY BAGS

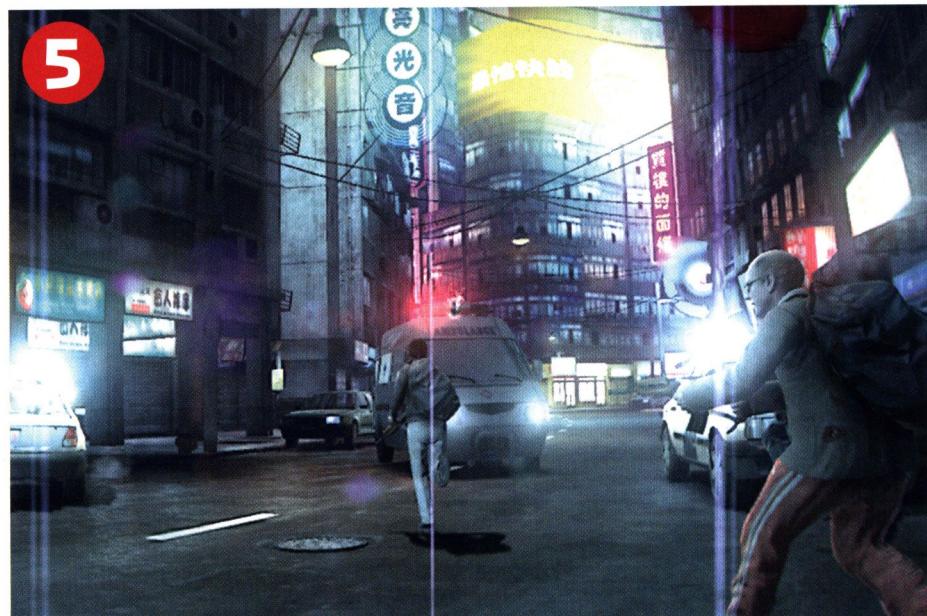
Once your team has pilfered the pennies, it's time to make an escape. It's no cakewalk, with police cops being despatched to gun you down as you flee. In some modes, dead robbers will re-spawn as cops making the escape even more challenging.

3. FISHY BUSINESS

There will be a half-dozen multiplayer maps when the game ships and IO are remaining tight-lipped about whether more will follow. One of the most distinctive is set in a Shanghai fish market, where a massive shipment of valuable stuff is lying around for you to steal. A handful of guards protect it, but the most dangerous people are your teammates, as one might betray the team, steal the haul, and rush to freedom for personal glory.

4. STATE OF LOVE AND TRUST

Kane & Lynch's multiplayer is all about betrayal and trust. If the team works together, the total loot is split equally the round's end. But those with a bit more ambition can gun down a teammate and steal his money. Once he's does this, he's on his own and can be shot with impunity, but he also has a chance of making off with a much larger haul.



5. WATCH YOUR BACK

Once inside the escape vehicle you can hold it for your friends, just let it go in its own time, or bribe the driver to leave, splitting your money with him and securing you a bigger haul. Rushing for the escape vehicle is also the time when you're most likely to pounced on by a supposed friend and have all of your cash nicked, so you will have to keep your wits about you as you flee.



6. DIRTY TRAITOR

The most intriguing mode on display was Undercover Cop. In this game, a random player is picked to be the filth. There's no way of knowing who it is other than observing your team's movements. Is one guy hanging around the back too much or sprinting ahead? The undercover cop can't be shot by the police, but he can't kill them, so checking out teammates during shootouts is important. The undercover has strict rules governing his behaviour, but if he succeeds in eliminating all the robbers before they escape, the rewards are his and his alone. Fear and distrust are palpable in this mode, so cops can let the robbers take each other out as paranoia takes hold of them.

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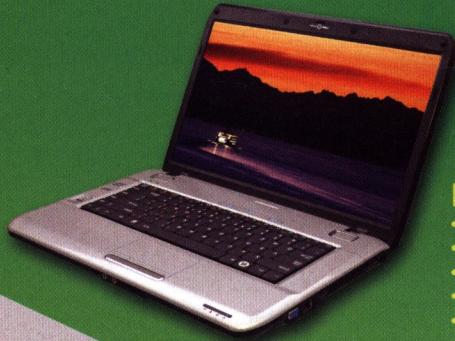
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The "end of the world" look needs work.



BACK IN THE GAME...

GUILD WARS 2

David Brown finds out what's been going on in Tyria

DEVELOPER ArenaNet PUBLISHER NCsoft WEBSITE guildwars.com

MANY AEONS AGO, there was an MMO called *Guild Wars*, which was much loved because it didn't have any subscription fees. You could play at your own pace, knowing that you weren't being charged through the nose for the privilege of doing nothing.

The game was surprisingly good fun, too, having a rock-solid PvP element and an engrossing plot (for an MMO). While

it didn't reach *World of Warcraft* levels of popularity, hundreds of thousands took to the lands of Tyria to see what all the fuss was about. Three full-blooded expansions followed and then a sequel was announced.

Then nothing. Not a sausage for years. Nobody even knew, for sure, whether work was still going on. Wags suggested it was a *Duke Nukem Forever* situation, but thankfully they were ever so wrong. Because *Guild Wars 2* does indeed exist.

The years spent in the shadows have allowed *Guild Wars 2* to develop into a potentially unique MMO beast, one that is going to vigorously push forward its own approach to the genre, namely

focusing heavily on personal stories. When creating a character, you'll be presented with an *Elder Scrolls*-style question system, the results of which go

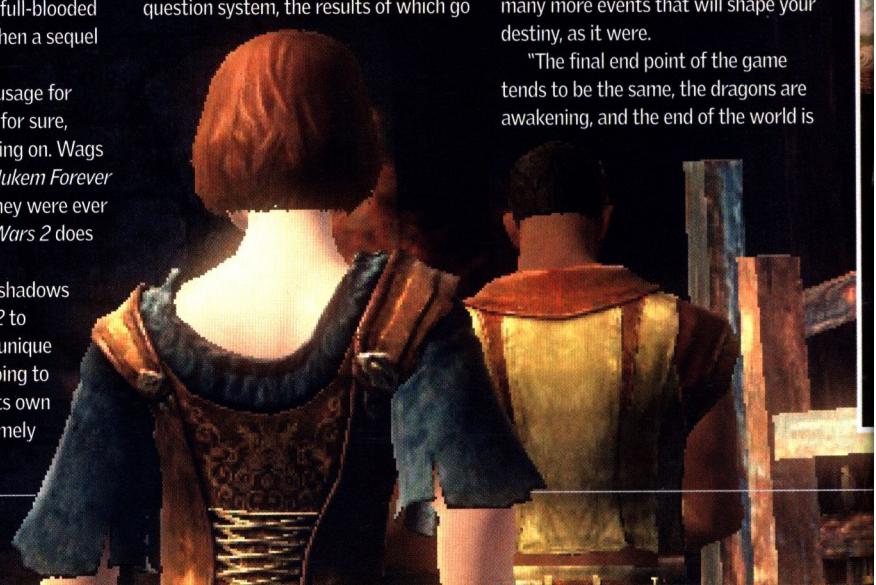
towards forming your chosen avatar's back story, motivations and allegiances. As you progress, you'll come across many more events that will shape your destiny, as it were.

"The final end point of the game tends to be the same, the dragons are awakening, and the end of the world is

THE LOWDOWN

- ✓ Personal stories
- ✓ Not instanced (as much)
- ✓ No subscriptions
- ✓ Play as a Charr
- ✗ Will it all actually work?

ETA
**SPRING
2011**



THE STORY SO FAR... GUILD WARS



PROPHECIES

The world of Tyria is introduced, in green and reds.

2005



FACTIONS

Brought Cantha: a land of assassins, ritualists and Eastern mystery.

2006



NIGHTFALL

Elona, from the second expansion, had an African theme.

2006



EYE OF THE NORTH

This expansion had rather chilly feel.

2007

"As you progress, you'll come across many more events that will shape your destiny"

coming," says Ree Soesbee, Lore and Continuity Designer on *Guild Wars 2*, "but when you and I get there and want to face that climactic battle, you might be doing it because you want to save a town from the dragon and I might be doing it because it killed my sister."

ONE OF MANY

NCsoft hope this will give players an extra incentive to create a number of different characters and also will make them more personally involved and connected to each of their avatars. You can even bring your buddies along to help you push your personal story along, with them acting as helpers or sidekicks, but the choices about what happens would all be yours to make.

They also promise that the world won't just be a fixed tableau that constantly redraws itself and is basically unchangeable. "Fighting an epic enemy only to see him respawn a moment later, or feeling as if the most important thing you did today was murdering 10 rats, can cause a game to have a flat, repetitive feel," laments Soesbee.

"If you save a village, it will remain saved. If you go back there, the NPCs will remember you and talk to you, because they know you did something for them. If you save the village, but allow your friend to die, that person stays dead. You don't find him standing around waiting for the next guy. He's gone for you."

The first *Guild Wars* was broken up into two sections. Hub areas were where players congregated to form groups and so on, while the bulk of your time was spent in the instanced areas, where only you and your party existed. These were sealed off from everyone else and created specifically for each individual group. This isn't how MMOs usually work, and now, in *Guild Wars 2*, it isn't how it works either.

"In the wider world, we have the events system, where you may come upon a situation where a group of humans is being attacked by a creature and they're yelling for help, and you and everyone else on that map can go and save them," Soesbee explains. There'll be still be some instanced zones, like your

house that can be customised and develops with your story, but that still means the vast majority of your game time (90%, Soesbee claims) will be spent interacting with others in the world at large, a huge difference in approach from the first game.

We've yet to see *Guild Wars 2* in action, but it sounds like everything *Guild Wars* fans could want from a sequel, and with its subscription-free model it should also continue to tap into the casual player market the first one reaped so many rewards from.

With its more personal approach to storytelling weaved around a more traditional, non-instanced format, NCsoft could be onto a massive winner with this MMO. If they ever get around to releasing it. **PCZ**

"Can someone invent the fire brigade please?"

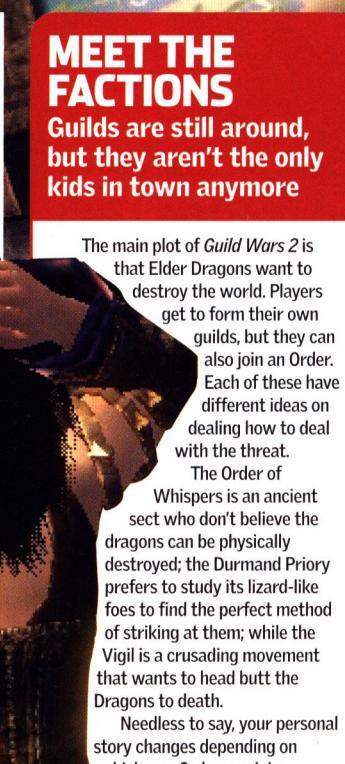
MEET THE FACTIONS

Guilds are still around, but they aren't the only kids in town anymore

The main plot of *Guild Wars 2* is that Elder Dragons want to destroy the world. Players get to form their own guilds, but they can also join an Order. Each of these have different ideas on dealing how to deal with the threat.

The Order of Whispers is an ancient sect who don't believe the dragons can be physically destroyed; the Durmand Priory prefers to study its lizard-like foes to find the perfect method of striking at them; while the Vigil is a crusading movement that wants to head butt the Dragons to death.

Needless to say, your personal story changes depending on whichever Order you join.



UPFRONT HANDS-ON

AKRID STENCH?

ETA
WINTER
2010

LOST PLANET 2

Adam Glick spends the introduction of every game looking slightly lost

DEVELOPER Capcom PUBLISHER Capcom WEBSITE lostplanet2game.com

THE TIME IT took for my co-op buddy and I to wrap our feeble minds around what was happening during *Lost Planet 2*'s prologue was embarrassingly lengthy. I was bleating about mounted guns and flying enemies and he claimed to be piloting the vehicle, which on my screen was a drop ship whistling through a canyon. Unless he'd suddenly transmogrified into Chuck Norris, this scenario seemed unlikely. I was starting to wonder if I'd joined the wrong multiplayer session.

We did eventually realise that *Lost Planet 2* does something that, for some reason, isn't commonplace in co-op games: it starts with two teams of

players doing entirely different things, and they only reconvene after their own particular prologue. There's no threat of death, and everything synchronises perfectly, including cutscenes, with a neat boss battle rendezvous at the end. After that, you're bundled together and whisked off to a jungle environment for the initial mission proper.

And then things seem to get immeasurably less interesting. *Lost Planet 2* is, like its predecessor, an extremely straightforward shooter. The visuals are



THE LOWDOWN

- ✓ Giant monsters
- ✓ Flavoured pirates
- ✓ Varied scenery
- ✗ Average shooting
- ✗ Bloody Battle Gauge

Why do future soldiers always resemble the SS?



THE STORY SO FAR...
JUN TAKEUCHI



STREET FIGHTER II
Remains the world's fave beat-'em-up.

1992



RESIDENT EVIL
The game that coined the phrase "survival horror genre".

1996



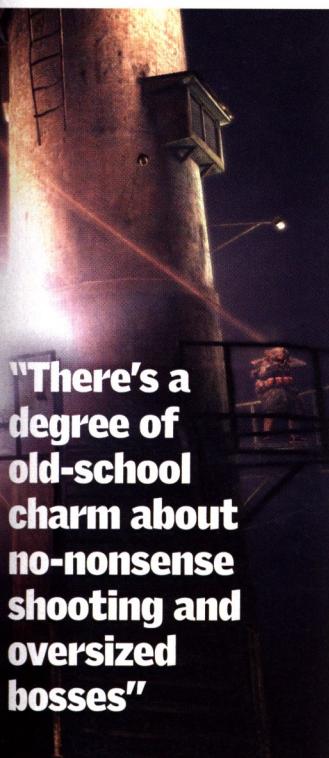
LOST PLANET
Initially an Xbox 360 title, it was ported to PC later in the year.

2006



RESIDENT EVIL 5
The series shambled, like a zombie, into racism controversy.

2009



"There's a degree of old-school charm about no-nonsense shooting and oversized bosses"

LET'S PLAY DRESS UP

Unlocks aren't all po-faced weapons and armour

In a refreshing change from most lead-heavy games, Capcom appears to have a sense of humour about the items you earn during play. Arguably the coolest addition is Albert Wesker, regular antagonist in the *Resident Evil* series. The Xbox 360 version also contains two of *Gears of War*'s burly rugby rejects, though whether they'll make it to the PC version remains to be seen.

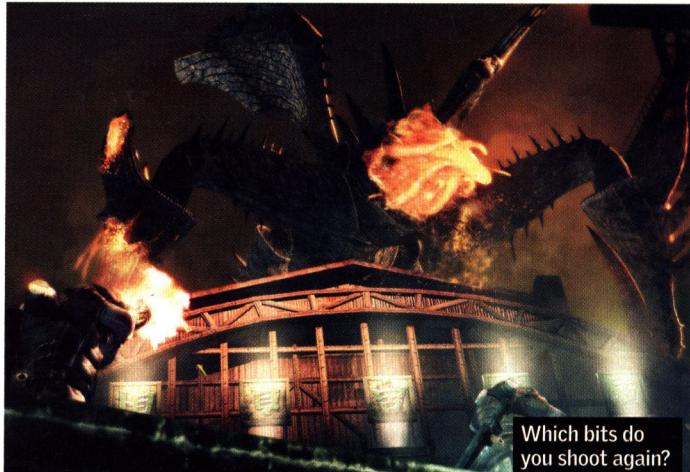
The most ludicrous unlocks are the emotes, though, a series of campy celebratory animations that can be triggered at any time. Watching Wesker mincing around like a loon is entertaining, particularly when he's about to be flattened by a giant Akrid claw. Simple pleasures.



The recoil's going to castrate him.



Surprisingly low-tech looking gun that.



Which bits do you shoot again?

dense, but not particularly pretty, the characters are still disproportionately squat and the combat consists of unloading as much of your ammunition into glowing orange bits of giant insects or the fleshy melons of human pirates. You also spend an awful lot of your time hammering a button to open up data posts which act as respawn points.

At the very least *Lost Planet 2* retains its ridiculous scale, you'll be battling enormous Akrid throughout the campaign, and it's difficult not to be impressed as you attempt to wrangle an insect that's four storeys high. In one sequence, you're on a train speeding across a vast desert like on a *Dune* sandworm – there aren't many shooters that are this hot stand and if you can

rope three mates in, you'll be thankful for the added firepower.

BAD CO-OPS

Unfortunately, because the game is so clearly weighted towards co-op, Capcom has felt the need to balance the difficulty for larger teams. The Battle Gauge is a shared collection of points which are diminished every time a character is killed and crucially, it isn't replenished after you've spent 15 minutes plugging away at an enormous Daddy Long Legs.

Respawns from local data posts are unlimited as long as your Battle Gauge still has juice, but woe betide any team that runs out of points. The punishment for allowing it to drop completely to zero is the gaming equivalent of a rap across

the arse cheeks with a metre ruler – you and your co-op buddies are dumped in the lobby and politely asked to start the entire chapter again, no matter how close to completion you were. Thanks, but we suspect most players would rather dip their unmentionables in a bubbling chip pan than start a lengthy chapter from the beginning.

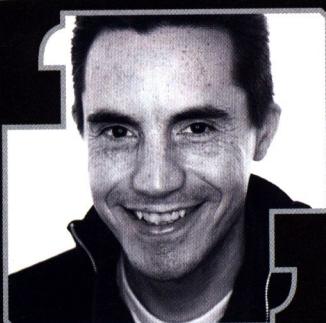
There is a degree of old-school charm about no-nonsense shooting and oversized bosses, and the game will reward obsessive play with a series of unlocks that hoarders will adore. There are side objectives to be completed as well, such as grappling and riding an Akrid, which give you credits to spend on a fruit machine that spits out emotes, attire and weapons.

Sadly from what we've played it seems that the majority of the joy is

harpooned through the spine by a series of, presumably Japan-centric, design decisions and a largely irrelevant plot.

Aside from the single player mode, there's a competitive multiplayer arena mode, which allows you to mash your buddies in a selection of mech and power armour flavoured Vital Suits, but it's hardly going to rip you away from the established names in multiplayer gunplay.

The time we've spent playing *Lost Planet 2* hasn't inspired us to tattoo the game's name across our moobs and dance naked through the nearest shopping centre singing its praises. There will probably be a few masochists who become enamoured with its quirks, but given the wide selection of excellent shooters on the PC we reckon this is going to hit the shelves with all the impact of a wet paper towel. **PCZ**



NATHAN CAMARILLO
EXECUTIVE PRODUCER, CRYYSIS 2

CONCRETE JUNGLIST

David Brown activates interview mode just in time to meet Crytek's Nathan Camarillo

PEOPLES ARE STILL AFRAID of *Crysis*, that computer-destroying behemoth of almost three whole years ago. But you don't need to be worrying about *Crysis 2* causing everthing in your PC's case to melt, according to Nathan Camarillo.

The sequel is also not going to be bowing down to console conventions, which was another cause of major concern. Here's what Camarillo had to say about these and other important matters to do with *Crysis 2*.

Q Should we be scared of what *Crysis 2* will do to our PCs?

A If you've got a minimum spec that's near to what a console would be, then you expect a console level of experience. Those who are seeing the videos of what console gameplay looks like, and are above the minimum spec, those people will go, "Oh if it looks awesome on that kind of hardware then I want to play that."

I think people will make more informed choices this time around.

No-one should be worried about the game being multi-platform, as the engine scales for each platform.

Do you think people played pirated versions of *Crysis* to see if it ran on their PCs?

We know how many downloaded pirated copies of *Crysis* – we saw the number of fake IDs. And yeah, a lot of people were worried that whether it would work, but they could have gone out and bought it after they downloaded it. We'll see what happens.

We see so many great developers open and close and a lot of it is down to how money moves around the industry and whether any of it gets back to publishers and developers.

Is it true there's a 'cover system' in the game?

There is a cover system but it's just very subtle, like the ones in *Crysis* and *Far Cry*. If your gun's pointing up, then you're in cover – it's a visual metaphor, better than having a gun sticking in the wall. If you select iron sights then you

"We know how many downloaded pirated copies of *Crysis* – we saw the number of fake IDs"

Piracy is a big issue on the Xbox 360 right now, along with secondhand sales. You can't fight all of it, but the industry needs to be aware of it because of the impact it has on developers and publishers through the damage to sales.

pop out and you can lean. It's not a 'lock on/lock off' model like *Gears of War* – it's tied into iron sights. Why would you want to iron sight into a wall? You don't, you want to lean out, or lean over.

Has the suit been streamlined?

The interface has been streamlined, but we haven't taken any of the core powers away from *Crysis*.

We've split strength into upper body and lower body, so there's an element of 'Strength' that has been moved to armour, so you can do stuff without taking damage, you know, rip heavy machine guns off their mounting, something normal humans couldn't do.

We found that in *Crysis* what people wanted to do is use Speed to charge a guy and then change to Strength to take them out, but it was hard to pull off, so most people tended to use Strength when pouncing from close range so they could wallop someone.

Streamlining by shuffling things around a bit gives you all the powers from *Crysis*, but makes more sense in what you can now do.

Can you punch structures to death?

There'll be ways of disturbing the environment that'll be similar.

How about throwing cars about?

No, that'd be too much like being the Hulk. But you will be able to shove them, knock them into people.

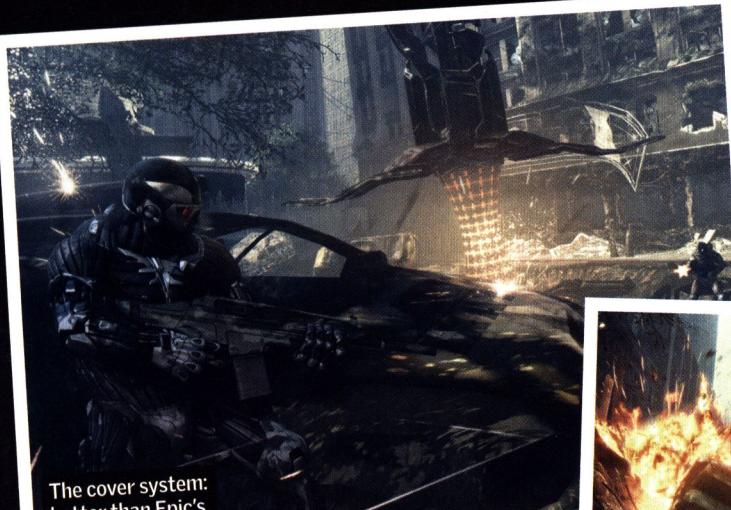
You can turn them into explosive devices – stick C4 on one, set the alarm off and have enemies come and investigate it, then blow up the gas tank – so they're an all-in-one tool.

But you can use an umbrella as a weapon?

When you turn on armour you get upper body strength too now, and yes, you'll be able to use things in the world as weapons effectively.

Does the Stealth mode last longer than in the first game?

We're still in tuning so hard to say. We want to make things more accessible, so maybe. **PCZ**



The cover system: better than Epic's.



Nathan Camarillo's party trick.



COOL RUNNINGS

Camarillo's cool moment

"I was on the steps of Federal Hall. I fired a grenade at an enemy and it blasted him into the air as a rag-doll. He landed on a car that was on fire and that caused just enough damage to make it explode, and there was an alien standing by the car and his body went flying, and it looked so awesome.

"This won't happen again, which is the great thing about systemic gameplay. There'll be structured events that everyone will talk about, as well as things that happen just to you."



"Well gosh darn."

ETA
12 OCT
2010

YOU'VE BEEN TANGO DOWNED...

MEDAL OF HONOR

David Brown doesn't even know the meaning of the word 'honor'

DEVELOPER EA LA PUBLISHER EA WEBSITE ea.com/games/medal-of-honor PREVIOUSLY IN... Issue 218

THE PEOPLE BEHIND the scenes on the *Medal of Honor* project say the game will be split into two distinct parts. Not literally, a la *StarCraft II*, but there will be two intertwining threads providing "variety" – a similar structure to that seen in *Modern Warfare 2*.

The first strand will be the US Rangers, performing what EA LA are calling 'sledgehammer' missions. They'll form a brute-force front-line attack

that'll deflect attention away from the second strand, the Tier 1 special forces blokes, who prefer to take things smooth and slow: the 'scalpel' to the Rangers' hacksaw.

FAMILIAR SHOOTING

The room in which us journalists types are hearing all this is relatively plush. There's also a weird setup with big headphones going on, where the throng have to tune them to a specific frequency in order to hear the in-game audio. What appears on the screen, once all the headphones business is sorted out, is everything you'd expect from a modern desert-based shooter: it's very sandy and people shout "Tango Down" a lot.

This particular presentation is focusing on the US Rangers, a team of regular GI Joes (complete with a sickeningly sugary intro video, showing the hero penning a heartfelt

note to his sweetie back home) who have to get the job done. This mission follows a familiar path – the squad have to take out a machine gun nest that's preventing some allied helicopters from landing. Destroy the nest, secure the landing site, the usual.

What makes the mission more interesting isn't the action, which is fairly

"Accusations of *Medal of Honor* riding on the coattails of *Infinity Ward's* game have been flying about"

routine stuff, but the setting. The accusations of *Medal of Honor* being a copycat and riding on the coattails of *Modern Warfare 2* have been flying about already, but credit has to be given to EA LA – they've done a good job at giving their game a fresh setting. It seems strange to say this, and it's perhaps something that can only be said

once you've seen the game in action, but there's a substantial difference between this game and its rival. An odd thing to say, considering the blatant similarities apparent in this game and *Infinity Ward's* game.

Medal of Honor feels and looks like it's set in Afghanistan, especially when the squad starts making its way through

a canyon, flanked by enemies on the surrounding cliffs. In some ways, a fairer comparison would be *Bad Company 2*, as the in-mission chatter between *Medal of Honor's* characters evokes that game.

There's more depth to these guys than the ones in *Bad Company 2* though, with characters providing a "mag report", detailing how much ammo they've got, or

Poser.



THINGS THAT COULD EXCITE US

What *Medal of Honor* needs to do right

GRIT

The *Band of Brothers/Saving Private Ryan* story line is played out. We need some gritty realism to wash away anodyne Spielberg-isms.

CO-OP

This would make our day. Spec Ops was one of the best bits in *Modern Warfare 2*, so something of that level of quality will be warmly received.

CHOPPERS

So often placed gun or helicopter missions are tedious, on-rails yawn marathons. We're crossing our fingers and hoping EA LA are preparing something special.

DEDICATION

While it isn't the most thrilling feature, dedicated servers would send a message to the community that yes, EA do want you playing together and embracing clan life. And that we'll always salute.



Two = better than one.



Who set off the CS grenade?

perhaps even asking whether you need to restock your own bullet supply.

Despite this, it's difficult to shake the feeling we've seen and done all this before. If the game's name wasn't emblazoned all over the room we were in, it would've been tough to work out what game we were seeing. This is an issue if you're fed up with military shooters, but not if you're not. Certainly, a lot of the those attending seemed jaded and were finding it difficult to muster significant degrees of enthusiasm, much like when WWII shooters seemed all-pervading.

GENRE OVERKILL

Though from what has been shown *Medal of Honor* should end up being, at the very least, a solid 'epic shooter', set in a surprisingly different environment and featuring all the bluster and bombastic action you've come to expect from this sort of game.

Another reason to be optimistic is that DICE are crafting the multiplayer

component, so if everything else suddenly implodes upon itself and we end up with a game that rivals *Rogue Warrior* (issue 217, 34%) for naffness, at least we'll have a good time scrapping with ourselves.

There are still a few unanswered questions that could lower the belt on the Trousers-Off-O-Meter a bit more too, such as whether there'll be a co-op mode or dedicated servers. There are also the unseen Apache helicopter missions, which could easily turn out to be pants-shredding in their brilliance.

Lessons will surely have been learned from certain other titles in the crowded military shooter genre, so now it's just a question of how EA LA will meld the new with the overly familiar. While the trousers aren't descending below the knee for now, there's still that chance they could fly out the window given the right developments. **PCZ**



Now playing:
The Doors. Loudly.

"Watch out for
wombles, Randy."

A decent depiction of the
"thousand yard stare."

UPFRONT FEATURE

ETA
AUTUMN
2010

FUN ON THE RIM...

BRINK

Vaulting over boxes gets Alec Meer excited

DEVELOPER Splash Damage PUBLISHER Bethesda Softworks WEBSITE brinkthegame.com

YES, THEY'VE GOT big, funny faces. Get over it. There was a bloke in the long-awaited recent demonstration of how Splash Damage's first game since *Enemy Territory: Quake Wars* who couldn't get over the distorted body shapes.

"Is there a narrative reason," he inquired, "why everyone's got chimp-like arms and faces like Droopy Dawg?"

No. No there isn't. This is just one of those all-too-rare first-person shooters which wishes to be instantly recognisable

from a single screenshot. As well as having those delightfully goon-faced characters it's set in a floating city in a near-future, post-disaster world, which has an aesthetic halfway between those of *Portal* and *Fallout 3*. The game's looks are just one of a crap-load of reasons to be excited about *Brink*. Here's another: it wants to unite the tribes of single-player and multiplayer shooter fans in a way which hasn't been done before.

The broad-strokes categorisation of *Brink* is that it's a class-based team shooter in the *Team Fortress 2* mould – two sets of nutters war over capture points – and it's a very good one at that.

The Ark, a techno-refuge for Earth's survivors, isn't in great shape. Humanity has been grouped into two rival factions: Security, who are theoretically in charge, and the Resistance, a militant equal-rights group. The former are slick, high-

tech soldiers, whilst the latter are bric-a-brac guerrillas.

PLEASING EVERYONE

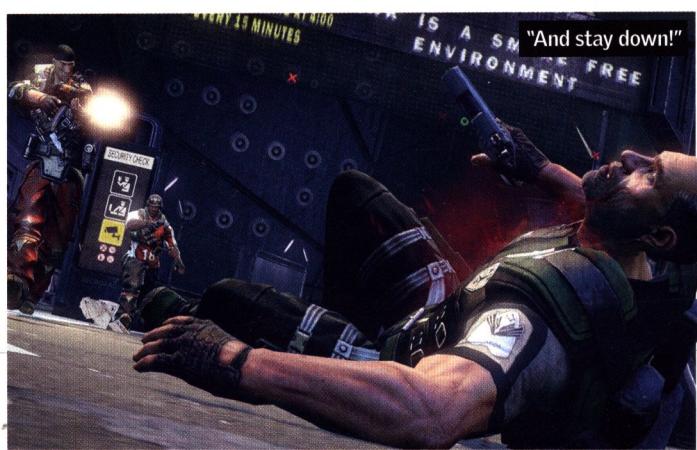
As a multiplayer game, *Brink* seems to come from another world compared to the over-complicated *Quake Wars*. The interface is svelte and logical – all Apple-like radial dials and big, friendly buttons – while team play is something you're actively rewarded for (primarily with experience points).

On top of that is the controversial SMART system. Vaguely analogous to *Assassin's Creed*'s parkour button, this is a toggle that makes your character automatically leap under, over or onto obstacles in the direction they're moving in.

The idea isn't that SMART grants an unfair edge, but simply that it allows you to concentrate on doing well

THE LOWDOWN

- ✓ Handsome yet ugly
- ✓ Minimal interface
- ✓ Single/multiplayer integrated
- ✓ Joyful character customisation
- ✗ Risks overreaching



THE STORY SO FAR...
SPLASH DAMAGE



SPLASHY
Modders and TV presenters, big on *Quake III*, team up.

2001



WOLFIE
Make *Wolfenstein: Enemy Territory*. Gamers love them.

2002



DOOMY
Splash makes maps for *Doom 3*'s ignored multiplayer mode.

2003



QUAKEY
Quake Wars comes out right after *TF2* and gets spanked.

2007

Skaters vs the boys in blue.

"Brink wants to unite the tribes of shooter fans"



at the shooting part of the game, rather than wasting time bumping into small walls or falling off ledges. *Brink* is accessible, in other words. While this is a red rag to hardcore shooter bulls, some as-yet-unspecified traditional multiplayer modes, plus the fact that fine control will often outdo SMART movement, should keep them off everyone else's backs.

All of this is also available in *Brink*'s single-player mode. This doesn't involve playing multiplayer maps with AI bots,

and it's not an unrelated campaign of shooting idiots in corridors: it's the multiplayer game made single-player. Or, to put it another way, it's the single-player game made multiplayer. At any point, you can take your single-player game online and invite in mates or let in strangers to replace the two teams of eight soldiers with real people.

You're playing through a story – two in fact, respectively documenting the struggles of the Security and Resistance

ENEMY WARS

Splash Damage will be respecting their roots



Despite having a single-player side to it *Brink* is based around co-op play, but what of traditional multiplayer? Obviously the objective-based maps are played as 8v8 battles, but there may be other modes.

"We'll definitely do Stopwatch [a map is played twice, with teams swapping defensive and offensive roles. The side who seizes the map fastest wins]. It's definitely been the best way for clans to compete," Splash Damage CEO Paul Wedgewood told us.

"We're taking inspiration from lots of other game modes but really making it feel different. So we can have an action that people find common, like planting a charge, but we can use that objective to create so many different styles of gameplay."



humanity is in this beleaguered world. Also, it has lots of guns in it.

GUNPHILIA

If you like guns, you'll be well-served here. As is the vogue of the moment, *Brink* includes a weapons unlock system, where experience points get you all manner of customisation options. This is far more ambitious than the Now You Have A Slightly Different Machine Gun treadmill we're used to from other modern shooters.

First up, there are guns. Of course there are guns. Guns with names like Maximus and Sea Eagle. Then there are gun modifications – gloriously absurd disc-shaped Tommy gun ammo packs, scopes, and six-vent anti-recoil muzzles. You'll very quickly build visibly bespoke weaponry that suits your own play style. You'll do the same with your unlocked abilities which can be buffs that up your hit points, tell you when you're in someone's crosshairs,

sides – replete with impressive cutscenes that look at the war from an overall and personal perspectives. One mission, for instance, sees the Resistance trying to destroy a Security-run nuclear generator, but the cutscenes cover one soldier's misery that his brother has signed up with 'the fascists' as much as they do the inevitable mega-explosion.

This isn't a playlist of arena fights. It's the tale of a desperate battle for humanity's future, and of exactly who

UPFRONT FEATURE

Bodystockings aren't good at stopping bullets.



or allow you to slip into a third-person mode for a better look at what's around you. They can also be class-specific skills, such as the Operative's Comms trick. This allows the Spy-a-like Operative to scan a dead foe's body to briefly reveal his mates' locations. Of course, by picking that you'll deny yourself another ability, such as the one that lets you disguise yourself as a downed enemy.

Levelling up means escalated power to some degree, but really it's about careful choice of abilities rather than having a horrifically unfair advantage over other players.

BMI MATTERS

There's also a choice about how many pies you've eaten. Your character's body shape is the most critical choice you'll make. By default, you're a medium – a good all-rounder.

Once you've levelled up a bit you can choose to mutate into an Agile or Heavy body type – the former able to move at

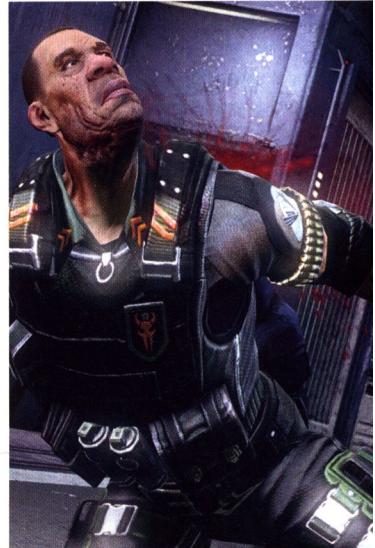
speed and reach areas the others can't, while the other is a hit point-laden warhorse, able to carry the game's most devastating guns. Unlike classes and weapons, which you can casually alter between re-spawns, your body type is a permanent decision. Splash Damage are hinting there will be ways to change your decision, but in general you're likely to start up a couple of alts so you get to play with a skinny, a biggy or a norm whenever you like.

You will, however, be able to tinker with your clothing at will. *Brink's*

character designer is a slick wee thing, flicking quickly between trousers, hats and the like with an ease that puts *The Sims* to shame. From I'm With Stupid T-shirts to flame-patterned hockey masks, it promises some fairly dramatic customisation – though this probably means the DLC cow will get a sound milking. When you march to war, you'll be fielding a dude who's very much yours, and not a generic beefcake soldier with a slightly different-coloured hat.

Online shooters have been sniffing around MMOs' back yards for a while,

Small heads, big arms, large hearts. Probably.



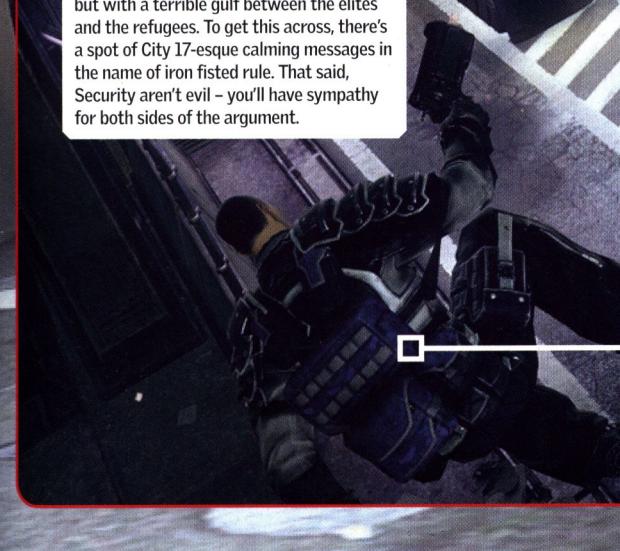
ARK LIFE

Why *Brink* is a more than just another team shooter



SHADES OF 1984

This isn't standard post-apocalyptic brown-o-vision. *Brink's* Ark is a tech-heavy society, but with a terrible gulf between the elites and the refugees. To get this across, there's a spot of City 17-esque calming messages in the name of iron fisted rule. That said, Security aren't evil – you'll have sympathy for both sides of the argument.



but *Brink* appears to be the rare example of getting it. Advancement isn't just about earning experience points – it's about building a character who reflects you. So long as your definition of your identity involves huge guns and camouflage pants.

This customisation is a major part of Splash Damage's intention to get people who traditionally cling to the ankles of

single-player games to relax their fear of online play. If you've built yourself a character you're proud of, you're going to want to show him off to people. Those NPC bots aren't going to notice, so open up your game and shake a tail feather.

Again, you can play the campaign mode online or in co-op, or you can play a standalone map, *Battlefield*-style. There's also the idea that you can choose objectives rather than simply surge forwards, into great danger, at all times.

Clearly *Brink* comes down to shooting other blokes in the face to achieve objectives that win the map for one side, but if you can't handle the heat, sneaking off to grab a command point or hack a safe earns team-wide bonuses.

The in-game GPS system will even recalculate a new route to an objective for you if it spots that you're headed towards a rear entrance or you're careering across rooftops.

This is looking like a shooter that wants you to have fun, not to creep

Ew! Don't look at his chin!



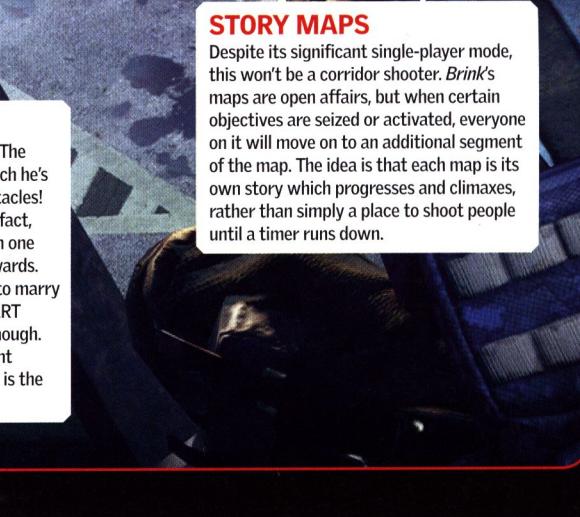
TWO-FACED GITS

While certain elements of your avatar are locked – specifically, how big he is – you're not stuck in the Security or Resistance factions. Your guy can play for either side, but his look will change. Resistance rock a charity shop skater look, while Security are anonymous, but sleeker-looking, military types. In other words, it's going to be hard to not gravitate to Resistance.



SMART CHAP

Look how cool he looks! The incredible ease with which he's navigating all those obstacles! I want to marry him. In fact, he's simply holding down one button and running forwards. The cheat. I don't want to marry him anymore. That SMART system is right clever, though. Even if "Smart Movement Across Random Terrain" is the worst acronym ever.



STORY MAPS

Despite its significant single-player mode, this won't be a corridor shooter. *Brink's* maps are open affairs, but when certain objectives are seized or activated, everyone on it will move on to an additional segment of the map. The idea is that each map is its own story which progresses and climaxes, rather than simply a place to shoot people until a timer runs down.

"This is looking like a shooter that wants you to have fun"

slowly forwards until some camper snipes you in the head.

Brink's a bloody ambitious game that's charging head-on into two huge risks: that its plans to lure in a new audience might alienate the shooter hardcore, and that it's still too close to the *Enemy Territory/Battlefield* model to lure in the mass audience it needs. The cutscene production values are very high, while the character customisation lends an additional backbone to proceedings. But much depends on how meaty its single-player game really is. And if *Brink* players' gradual switch from offline to online play is to be as organic as Splash Damage hope, there

has to be the same satisfaction to beating a single-player map.

The proof will be in the play, and we'll be hands-on with this noble beast again very soon. Until then, it's safe to coo at how marvellous it looks, how clever its concepts are, and how svelte the interface is.

We saw *Brink* at the same time as we saw id's *Rage*, and *Brink* seems fresher, stranger and more tantalising. The student may well be about to become the master. (And if you really want a narrative reason for the giant chins, let's just assume it's a by-product of a failed generation of genetically engineered supermen.) **PCZ**

BACK FROM THE...

DEAD SPACE 2

David Brown is in the mood for some mutant slicing

DEVELOPER Visceral Games PUBLISHER EA WEBSITE deadspace.ea.com PREVIOUSLY IN... Issue 218

THAT WAS A CLOSE CALL, what with all the stupid "Will they? Won't they?" nonsense about whether *Dead Space 2* was coming to the PC. It is, absolutely definitely. Even Steve Papoutsis, its executive producer, says so. "Yes," he answered to the pointedly direct question about whether this was indeed so. That's that sorted out, at least. You can breath easier now.

Dead Space 2 isn't set on an isolated space vessel, devoid of all human life this time. It's set three years after the first game's events, and the locale will now be a massively populated space city called The Sprawl. It's so called because it's, well, big. Some new enemies have been created with this urban populace in mind.

The Necromorphs (returning from the first game) will still be all icky, sticky and sickly looking, but there's more of a variety to them this time out, a concept embodied in the form of The Pack – mutated children.

ETA
EARLY
2011

"The Sprawl is a space-city, and there's lots of different human beings that live there."

"As far as people complaining [about killing mutant children], then sure, there's a lot of different opinions in the world. But you know, there's a level of believability, wanting to put something there that will creep people out."

The introduction of mutant kids is designed to freak out the player in the same way as the original.

The scares aren't all one-way either, with the challenge of making this sequel intimidating its developers.

BETTER SCARES

"It was awesome making *Dead Space*, it came out of the blue and was well received by critics and fans, and it's daunting to try and top it," Papoutsis admits. "In order to be a better game, we need to step our game up in all facets – that's in the visuals, enemy designs, new weapons, tools, and mechanics."

"Certainly horror is a big part of that, so when we're done with it, I hope we can say that it's scarier. That's a goal for us."

One of the ways Papoutsis' team is hoping to go about recreating the same level of awesomeness as *Dead Space* possessed is by introducing physics-based elements into what was previously a rather static world.

"Right now we're playing around with that stuff: if you shoot the lights out it gets dark and makes things harder, but what if we made it that certain Necromorphs couldn't see you?"

"One thing to us that's cool is that the light makes awesome shadows, so we want the player to play around with them. The idea of a Necromorph charging down a hall, knocking a light over and casting all sorts of creepy shadows, really appeals to us in the sense of the game being dynamic."

Isaac's girlfriend wasn't looking so hot...



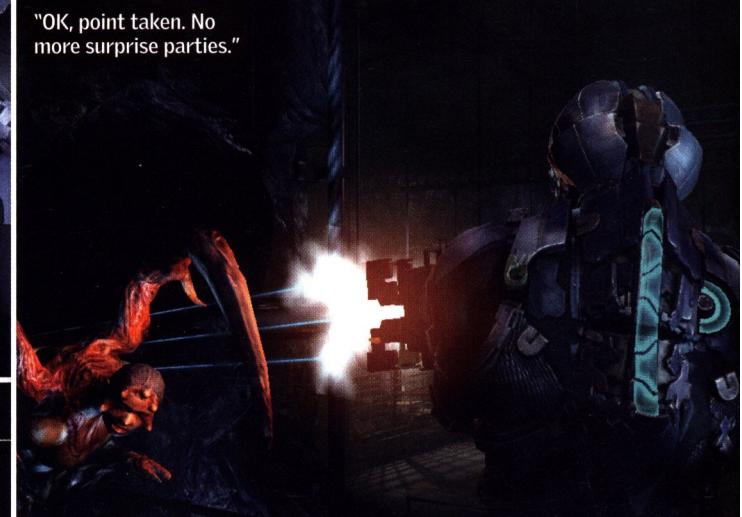
Creating feelings of dread and terror in a player isn't just about spilling lights onto the ground or having an undead baby leap out of a closet and go "Boo!" alarmingly, and this is something

Papoutsis and his team recognises. Believability is a buzzword in the *Dead Space 2* offices, making



"Surprise! Happy Birthday, Isaac!"

"OK, point taken. No more surprise parties."





sure that players are disturbed by the familiarity of the creatures around them.

"If you look at a Necromorph it seems human, but there are elements that are completely off – the jaw's missing for example – and that we found to be scary in itself, as everyone's got a jaw and people were thinking, 'Ew, I'd hate to have my jaw ripped off. What if that happened at the dentist?' It's kind of believable, kind

"It seems *Dead Space 2* won't disappoint anyone who partook of the original's delights"

of frightening; a 'Could that happen to me?' feeling.

"We want people to think that they've been in this type of office area before as people then tend to have preconceived notions of what happens in there. Then when something totally fucked up happens, you're like 'WHOA!' and that scares you more. That false sense of security can set the player up for terror and frights."

From what has been on show so far, it seems *Dead Space 2* won't disappoint anyone who partook of the original's delights. As Papoutsis acknowledges though, it's going to be very difficult to live up to the hype and the expectation, but it's something his team looks set to do, should all continue to go well. **PCZ**



Watch out for those
sacs o' corruption.

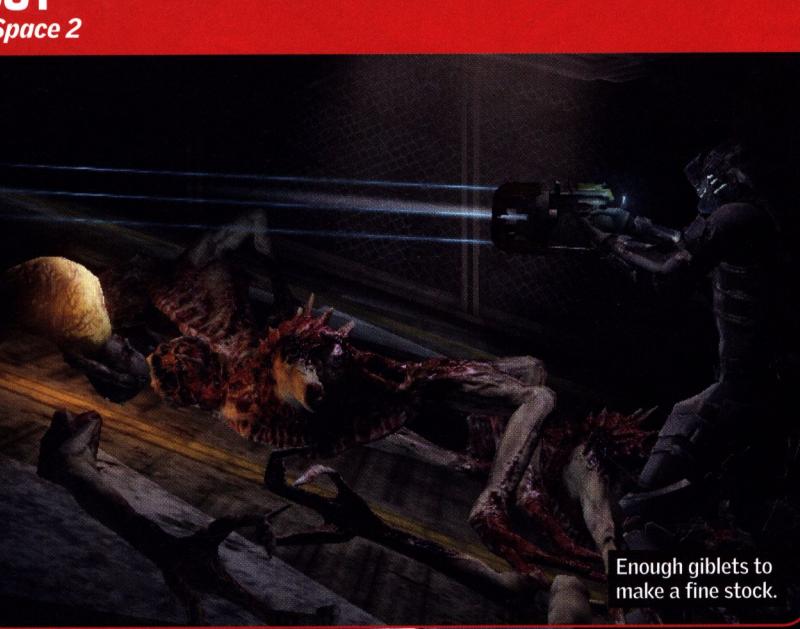
TRAIPSING ABOUT

Retracing steps in *Dead Space 2*

"There are several different players: there's the Hunter/Gatherer who's determined to get every pick up and audio log and will comb an area. Then there's the Rebel who'll say 'Well, the game's telling me to go left, so I'm going to go right to go back and see if there's anything that I need,'" Steve Papoutsis told us. "There's also the Racer – the other guy who wants to get through the game rapidly.

"We want to make sure that there's a clear goal for these player at all times that will keep them progressing through the game, but I can't say there won't be any backtracking involved."

"There's maybe going to be some times when we want to route you back through an area for another mission for example, but we're not consciously trying to make players backtrack."



Enough giblets to
make a fine stock.



ANGRY NOW...

RAGE

Will Porter gets in a hissy fit, before slaughtering the innocents of an apocalyptic wasteland

DEVELOPER id Software PUBLISHER Bethesda WEBSITE rage-game.com

A LONE MAN struggles to the surface from a vault deep underground, wearing the garb of a long-dead civilization. Earth is an arid wasteland, packed with warring bandit tribes and mutants, as the survivors of a world-wide disaster struggle to stay alive day-to-day. Call me crazy if you like, but I'm sure we've been here before.

In the past few years various companies have been hawking products that are a bit *Rage*-y. Of course id have never been ones to pay attention to games being nurtured elsewhere, but when you bear witness to *Rage*'s drought-ridden wasteland it's hard to contain a Pavlovian bark of "*Fallout 3!*" or "*Borderlands!*". And, later on, "*BioShock!*", "*Brink!*" or "*Doom 3!*"

ANOTHER WASTELAND

Directing this yelping into the face of *Rage*'s lead designer Tim Willits would've been rude. Instead, I scurried to the toilets, turned on the hand-drier to cover any noise, and shouted the rival names at my wide-eyed image in the mirror.

As I splashed water on my face and my senses returned to me, I got to wondering: Did it matter that *Rage* shared settings, phraseology and the colouration of its craggy mountains with other games – even those in

Bethesda's stable? This is an id game, and what matters in an id game is that when you shoot someone in the face with a shotgun it is excellent. From where I had been sitting, this appeared to be the case. What's more, you get a cool car.

"*Rage* takes place in the distant future, after an asteroid has destroyed most of civilization," Tim Willits had previously explained. "You're a person who was frozen in a cryogenic chamber – arks. The ark that you're in is damaged when it's brought back to the surface. So you're the only survivor."

"Fallout 3? Nope, never heard of it."

**ETA
2011**

THE LOWDOWN

- ✓ Engaging world
- ✓ Fab engine
- ✓ Buggy looks fun
- ✓ Self-made weapons
- ✗ Interior combat a bit *Doom*-y
- ✗ Overfamiliar setting

A mutant. We blame The Authority.

STORY SO FAR

ID SOFTWARE



WOLFENSTEIN 3-D
id create the first-person shooter, with the help of Nazis.



DOOM
id perfect the first-person shooter, replacing Nazis with demons.



QUAKE
id perfect the multiplayer first-person shooter, without needing Hitler.



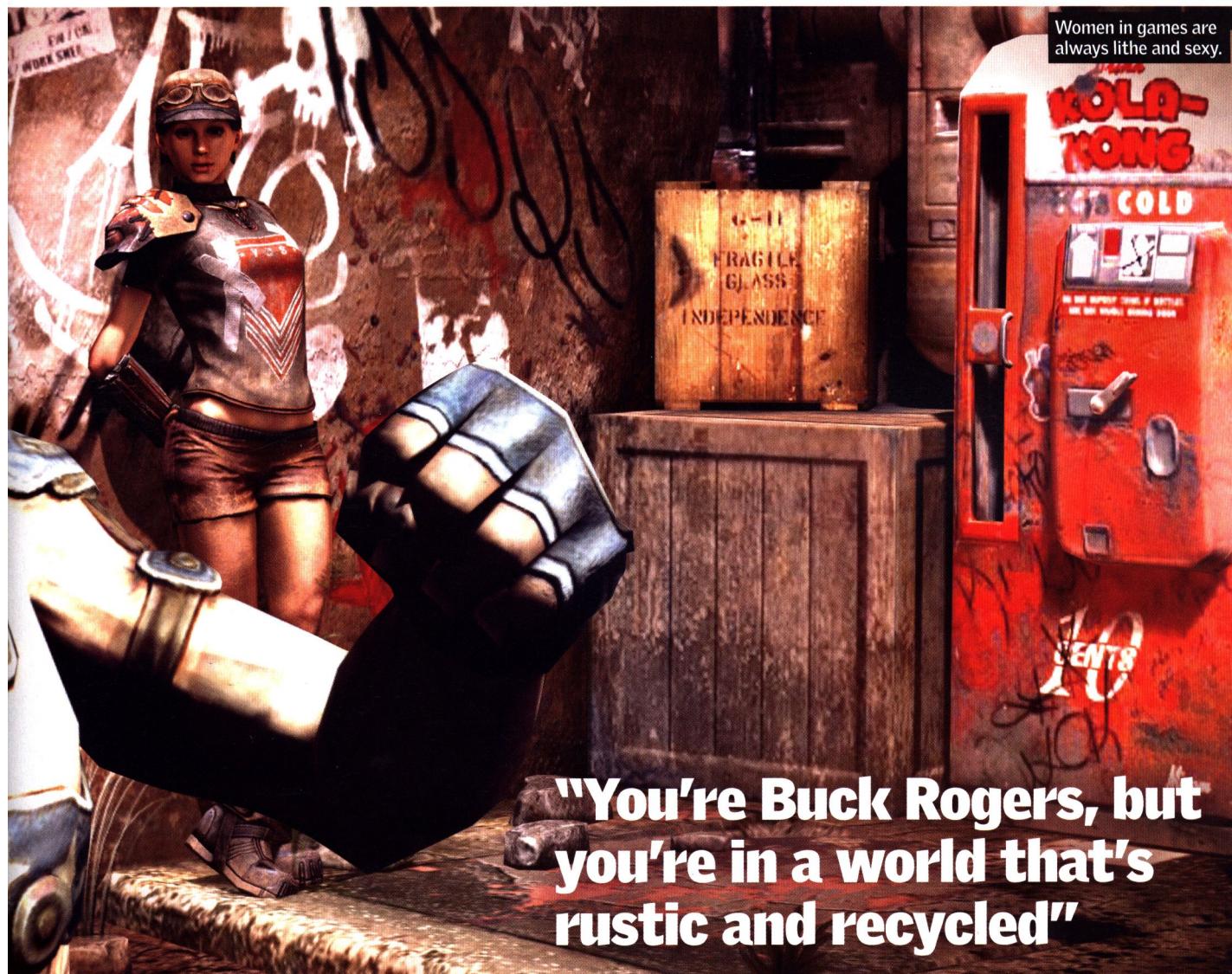
RAGE
id gives you an awesome buggy. No word whether they'll be any Nazis.

1992

1993

1996

2001



"You're Buck Rogers, but you're in a world that's rustic and recycled"



What follows is a directed, if not open-world, jaunt through the valleys, dried ocean floors and cowboy-vibe settlements of this new planet Earth. You'll take odd-jobs from the locals propping up the bar in the nearby town, taking you into familiar id corridor-crawl combat, and you'll gun over desolate hill and dale in your spruced-up buggy. Ultimately, you'll face The Authority – an omnipresent force with an unhealthy interest in some of the technology coursing through your veins.

"As part of the Ark programme you were injected with nanotrites. They heal you when you die, so you get a chance to de-fib yourself back to life," explains Willits. "We've set up this dichotomy. You're Buck Rogers – a futuristic man from the past – but you're in a world that's rustic and recycled."

"Ultimately part of the story arc is that you find out that there's more to these nanotrites than meet the eye. Is it cosmic

"Rage will fare well in the stormy waters of gaming"



This won't be pretty.

RETURN OF THE SENTRY BOT

Doom 3 favourite returns in new scuttly clothes

The highlight of id's 2004 torch-waver was undoubtedly a sequence in which you accompanied a beautifully animated, dog-like sentry bot through the Mars facility and watched it shoot holes in zombies. This is a sequence that id are looking to recreate in *Rage*.

There are various upgradeable spiderbots that you'll be able to create and deploy in the game should the opposition become a little fierce – and once again the design and animation of your scuttly little friends is immaculate.

radiation that made the mutants, or is it The Authority messing with nanotrites? There's a mystery that surrounds it."

RALLY JOY

Before nanotrites come into play you've got to get to grips with the getting from A to B. Your buggy is an upgradeable steed that'll accompany you throughout the game, although should you wish to walk between the game's locations then the option is open to you – albeit a somewhat trudging and boring one.

When you get into the car the action snaps from the first-person to a third-person car view in which you can roar off into the wild brown yonder with bonnet-mounted machine-guns blazing.

Bandits and mutants will have set up ambushes along your trail and various pieces of valley furniture are conveniently ramp-shaped, so your journeys will rarely be peaceful. In fact, should you like the car combat (and the screeching turns and impressive vehicle destruction suggests it's likely that you will) then





Carl will fix your buggy if you ask nicely.



Bandit tribes have unique fashions, graffiti and combat styles.

there'll be various side-missions that will send you back out into the wastes to take down some of the more evil and super-powered four-wheeled machines of this particular apocalypse.

Sooner, rather than later, you'll arrive in Wellspring to some familiar Western-style music licks and a cobbled together and scavenged material art style that concentrates on various rotor blades lazily revolving beneath the beating desert sun.

Wellspring is the first of two major hubs in the game – the other being Subway Town – and it meshes the ambience of *Deadwood*, *BraveStarr* and

Firefly with aplomb. The town's populace are all waiting to spin around you while waving their hands and delivering dialogue in a fashion that's reminiscent of Hicksville animatronics in Disney World.

While in town you can buy some new togs and get rid of the Ark suit that's got The Authority so interested in you, deliver bottles of water you've found in the wasteland for a cash reward, sell scavenged items, or meet up with race officials beneath a giant inflatable purple gorilla and take your buggy out for a competitive spin. It's an impressively realised area and – especially when compared to the traversal nightmare

that was *Fallout 3*'s Megaton – a cogent and appealing place to come back to between missions.

Deep below Wellspring, however, trouble's afoot. The Ghost bandit clan are poisoning the town's water supply – and as a stranger from the plains it's down to you to deal with them. As soon as you enter the pumping station environs *Rage* becomes recognisable as, to borrow a phrase from Mark Kermode "un game de id". There's just something in the shape of the guns, the weight you see in enemies, the ripples of their flesh and the design of the levels that just rings true.

This doesn't mean that things haven't moved on from *Doom 3*. The Ghosts vault, somersault and careen over the scenery like muscled dervishes – they're utterly beautiful to watch, yet fatal if you continue to do so. Flames and explosions are genuinely jaw-dropping in the way they light up the screen. And every bandit clan has its own behaviour patterns, graffiti and identity – where Ghosts are melee-focussed and remarkably nimble in their ceiling-slides

BORDERLANDS!
cough Sorry.

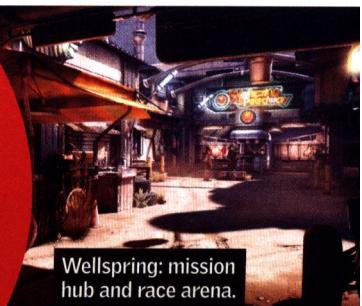


RECIPES FOR A DISASTER

Much as in *Fallout 3*, when you explore the wastes of *Rage* there'll be many and various items to pick up and potentially sell on to various shopkeepers of the apocalypse. Get the right combination of engineering items, and you'll be able to follow recipes to make devices that'll prove nifty in your warmongering.

There's a remote-controlled car bomb that works in a similar fashion to the *No-One Lives Forever* kitten, and there's a device that can unlock doors leading into secret areas.

There are also deployable turrets. If said turrets aren't damaged in combat then you can pick them up and re-use them, but if a bandit gives one a kicking then it'll fall back into their constituent parts when you return to it. Some of the parts will be damaged, but the rest should be available for you to re-use. Nothing like an asteroid impact to get people into recycling.



Wellspring: mission hub and race arena.

and leaps from pole to pole. The Wasted (a group based on British bovver-boys) are more into traditional run-and-gun firepower – and lots of it.

TOUCH OF KRULL

Your arsenal also goes far beyond the traditional one-note boomstick. The Ghosts may move around the scenery in the manner of Splicers, but they can be dispatched in a *BioShock* manner as well. Among the various different types of ammo your silent crossbow can be armed with are electro-bolts which can fry groups of badness foolishly standing in water. The pistol, too, has explosive rounds that are entirely pleasant to connect with a bandit ruffian's head. On top of these you'll have your trusty wingstick – a multi-bladed boomerang that can be hurled with your free hand and take off a grunt's head before he's seen the whites of your eyes.

None of this is fresh and original, but in terms of constituent parts coming together to provide a solid gameplay experience id appear to be onto a winner. Indeed, what with the huge range of engineered concoctions that you can scavenge and take into battle as well (see *Recipes For A Disaster*) it's clear that those put off by *Doom 3*'s basic combat from all those years ago are being aggressively woo-ed back into the fold.

In fact, when viewed in contrast to id's much bemoaned Mars Hell-leak *Rage* is fascinating as the polar opposite of id's previous wares. Where *Doom 3* was tight and confined, *Rage* is open and sprawling. Where *Doom 3* was dark, *Rage* is bright and primary-coloured. Where once *Doom-guy* was poe-faced and serious, the world of *Rage-bloke* is very silly indeed. In all likelihood, *Rage* will fare well in the stormy waters of modern gaming.

While it won't redefine the FPS genre as id games once did, it appears to be an engaging and enjoyable new terrain for a more refined brand of frags, head-slices and gibbing. Unless, of course, we're all fed up with apocalyptic wastelands by next year. Which, frankly, is unlikely. **PCZ**



ETA
SPRING
2011

No, take a firm grip on the pistols.

NO DISINTEGRATIONS...

STAR WARS: THE OLD REPUBLIC

Jon 'Log' Blyth gets Fettled up by a Bounty Hunter

DEVELOPER BioWare PUBLISHER EA/LucasArts WEBSITE swtor.com

THE THING ABOUT *Star Wars: The Old Republic* – and bear with me – is that I couldn't imagine it before I played it. All this talk of huge, unique stories, every class starting off on its own planet, and all players having companions – I just couldn't imagine how it fitted into the MMO template.

To be fair, that's because BioWare are being tantalising prick-teases. They're feeding us recognisable snippets of their brand of unsurpassed world weaving, morally complicated decisions and long-

term consequences, and the occasional glimpse of how that might fit into an MMO template.

The game's lead writer, Daniel Erickson, says that it's a chance for them to go back to that stage, when they'd all first heard of MMO gaming, and remember all the things they'd imagined it might be. In reality, it's very much like a cross between *Mass Effect* and *World of Warcraft*.

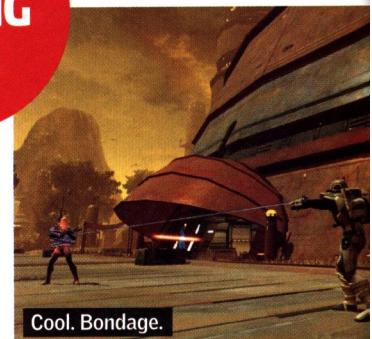
The Bounty Hunter, as a class, is a traditional ranged damage dealer. He's best at a distance from his enemy (why get closer, when your shortest ranged attack is 10 metres?) We're only at level six, admittedly, so our arsenal has yet to beef up, but that's the implication at the tutorial stage.

There's a heat mechanic that works like mana in reverse – decent attacks like the Flame Thrower build up heat, and that sets an upper limit on what

you can do. However, you can – once a minute – vent your heat instantly. It's a generous cooldown, and backs up the promise that this game be about fighting multiple mobs heroically, and less about "sitting on a hillside, eating bread". In fact, there's a heal-over-time option that you can use out of combat, that renders *WOW*'s food mechanic redundant.

The story is, as you'd expect, excellent. It's the one thing we can be sure of from the combined forces of LucasArts and BioWare (assuming old Georgie doesn't decide to lend a hand). Our Bounty Hunter – a Rattataki; bald, gothy, violent and the first non-human playable race – is doing the bidding of Nem'rō the Hutt.

Nem'rō asks us to decapitate key members of the rebellious Evocii, which we can – again, as you'd expect – do with varying amounts of evil. Role-playing is limited to three in-character options: you can be aggressive, professional, or



Cool. Bondage.

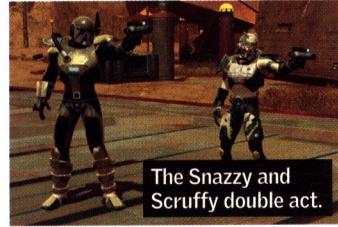
sympathetic but, just like *Mass Effect*, the summaries will be delivered in thoroughly believable dialogue.

I choose to not complete my mission, and bring back a fake head. This fools Nem'rō who thinks all Evocii look alike, because he's a fat racist. The next mission locks off that route, because we have to send the head to the victim's wife.

LucasArts and BioWare have recently revealed Advanced Classes too, although it's a typically frustrating reveal. At some point, each of the eight classes will refine into two advanced professions. The Sith Warrior was the only example given, and he'll refine into Juggernaut or Marauder: tank and melee DPS classes, respectively.

MUCH WORDAGE

Cannily, this takes the total classes to 16 without re-doubling the amount of dialogue that has to be written and performed. Both advanced classes will



The Snazzy and Scruffy double act.



Snazzy's still the smartest.

Wait until you get the Npower bill.



"Take two Lightsabers into a duel? Damn straight I do."

share the same epic class storyline. The total amount of dialogue written so far amounts to 50 *Star Wars* novels. They didn't want to make that a 100. Save that for the expansion packs.

There's a certain scepticism, that believes that the MMO and story led single-player RPG are two such well-honed and distant genres, they can only combine at the expense of each other. An MMO can never replicate the immediacy of *Knights of the Old Republic*'s combat, for example, and only a freakish *WOW* player actual reads the quest text. However, the playtests have all shown a dogged attempt at innovation, so we're looking at an MMO with unexplained levels of social interaction and PvP, but a bloody good story. If the bold promise to replace cooking, crafting, and general grinding with engaging story holds up to scrutiny, then we're on board. **PCZ**

THE LONG SLOW REVEAL

What we know so far about *The Old Republic*

CHRISTMAS 2008

The Old Republic's scope is revealed – every class has its own *KOTOR* story.

E3 2009

The Sith Warrior is revealed in a sweaty Los Angeles room. We're shown his morality paths: hard-ass murderer, or pragmatic professional.

DECEMBER 2009

The Sith Inquisitor gets a playable walkthrough – a less hands-on evil Force user.

MARCH 2010

The first goodie class, the Republic Trooper, is revealed. He can create his own cover and fires a laser rifle.

MAY 2010

The Bounty Hunter is playtested, and Advanced Classes are revealed.

NOW

COMPANIONS

We know every class will have them, but are they like pets, or *Mass Effect* squad members?

GROUPING

Won't it get hectic, with two companions each? How will dungeons and raids work?

PVP

Nothing's been mentioned about PvP yet, either. And space – we know nothing of space combat.

CRAFTING

The loot all seems as ludicrously detailed as *World of Warcraft*, but what do we do with it? Can we cook it?

SPRING 2011

Release!

Hoodie snipers are twice-hated.



GOING FULL THROTTLE...

NEED FOR SPEED WORLD

David Brown finds there's no place for conservative drivers in EA's MMO racer

DEVELOPER EA Black Box PUBLISHER EA WEBSITE world.needforspeed.com

IF YOU HAD TO CHOOSE one way of describing Jean-Charles Gaudéchon, lead producer on *Need For Speed World* at Black Box, it'd be "excitedly optimistic yet realistic." While not some kind of producing renegade, he's loose enough when describing his game to recognise the challenges *NFSW* faces.

MMOTORING

"We've wanted to do an MMO for a while, but we've been waiting for the player base to grow," he explains. "Even two years ago, people would ask what MMO meant, but this isn't the case any more. In other games, they're going for online, but they're looking at one aspect. We're looking to have multiple ways of using the game, so on the one hand there'll be a Pursuit mode, but people will also just be able to hang out and chat."

And when Gaudéchon says "MMO", he means lots of players racing online at the same time, which could get rather hectic, not to mention crippling internet connections. You've seen the "But no!" coming a mile away, haven't you?

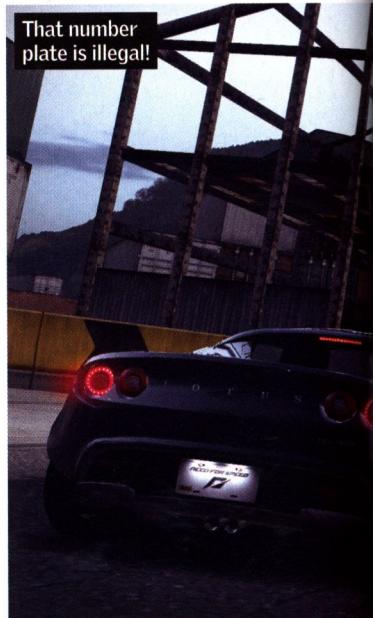
"You can match-make or chat with anyone, but you may not be able to see everyone who's online as there are rendering limits. We also don't want to compromise on how the game looks, it's *Need for Speed* and we're known for the polished high-detail cars. We could put 100 cars around you, but you'd lose detail and it wouldn't look gorgeous."

He's right, too. For an online game, *NFSW* does look very pretty indeed. The world itself is a mash-up of new

and old material, with some older *NFS* worlds being remodelled for a modern audience. The world itself will continue to grow through the addition of free content every four months or so.

One of the ideas thrown up by Gaudéchon is for desert canyon races, although expansions could also take the form of extra stuff being crammed into the existing areas. Black Box aren't ruling anything out just yet, although currently there will be only eight players per race.

"As we said, we don't want to compromise on quality or performance," Gaudéchon reiterates. "The biggest hit is because the cars have so many polygons. There are a couple of multi-player modes



that we're working on that we'd want more players for. There have been some awesome modes in our previous games that we want to carry over, which would be awesome in an MMO, such as having the whole cop experience and being able to take turns with your friends."

Being an MMO, the idea of levelling has made the transition from the world of beards and elves to that of pimping and cruising. There will be 50 levels for your character to progress through, RPG-style, but it's not going to be like a grind where you have to get to Level 28 to get that new car.

Flashy swine.

THE LOWDOWN

- ✓ Really solid driving model
- ✓ Keyboard controls work
- ✓ Few bandwidth issues
- ✓ Impressive visuals
- ✓ Free-to-play...
- ✗ ...to a point

ETA
SUMMER
2010

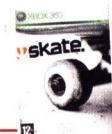


THE STORY SO FAR...
**POST-EA
BUYOUT**



NFS: HOT PURSUIT 2
Black Box began work on *NFS* games.

2002



SKATE
The youth culture simulator is irrelevant, as we can't play it.

2007



THE SIMS
Black Box picked up a few *Sims*-related development duties.

2008



NFS WORLD
Black Box's baby and their most ambitious title to date.

2011



Pimp that mother.



Hot pursuit mode! Yay!

"When Gaudechon says 'MMO', he means lots of players racing online at the same time"

"Racing games should be 'pick up and play' so that's why we've got the rental system that'll be a few pence or a few pounds, but you can download the game for free," Gaudechon stresses. "It's worth the money. You can get a GTO or a Lambo for a couple of days. So *NFSW* is pick up and play."

With micro-transactions being the order of the day, the bulk of the game will be free up to a point, after which things will only become available if you stump up a small amount of cash.

PLAY NOT PAY

"You don't have to pay your way through the game," Gaudechon says. "You pay to accelerate your progression or to 'rent' a high-powered car."

"Say all your friends are level 45 and you're level 30 as you haven't been able to play with them for a while, and they say 'Hey, we're doing a Porsche Cup this weekend.' You can rent a Porsche to make sure you're able to race with them."



AUTOMOTIVE EROTICA

The lengths car fans will go to to get their engine fix

Strutting its funky stuff.



"During the beta," explains Gaudechon, "I always have the chat panel open and it's amazing what some people are already coming up with, taking the game off on a tangent, we're seeing emergent gameplay already! Like these guys playing 'golf' with garbage cans and cars, these other guys doing car beauty contests in the stadium, taking photos. If you give power to the community, you find that they support the game more than you can and it's one of the successes of MMOs such as *World of Warcraft*."

It removes some of the grinding and connects people. We're going to see what happens if things get unbalanced then we'll react to that. We'll be listening to the users and the community as today's 'gurus' are the users. They tell us what they want."

This won't matter one bit if the game itself is rubbish, but thankfully it's looking like that will be far from the case. The driving model is sharp, with even the usage of keyboard controls feeling slick and convincing. Almost as importantly,

server and bandwidth issues should be few and far between, as even when playing on Canadian-hosted servers, latency issues are negligible.

With Black Box promising that the main hub of *NFSW* will be in England, us Brit-dwellers should experience some seriously good connections to the game. And as Gaudechon says "We've always felt that you can have loads of cool features, but if it's not a smooth experience, people won't come back to the game." Very true. **PEZ**

IT'S A HARD LIFE...

FABLE III

Adam Glick wants more *Fable* as soon as he is able...

DEVELOPER Lionhead Studios **PUBLISHER** Microsoft Game Studios
WEBSITE lionhead.com/fable/fableIII

ALTHOUGH IT NEVER came to the PC, *Fable II* was a refinement in almost every area over the original RPG. *Fable III* on the other hand has taken the role-playing rule book, soaked it in petrol, set it alight and then launched it over the battlements on a giant catapult. It's hardly surprising Peter Molyneux has become uncomfortable with giving *Fable III* the RPG label as it has taken shape.

For a start, the lists that hardcore role-players snuggle up to for comfort have been ditched. Molyneux reckons that most people are overwhelmed by the number of inventory items in RPGs and only end up using a small proportion of the thousands of objects included in those games, because it's not worth developing RSI in their mouse wheel finger. As a substitute, Lionhead has swapped the information traditionally found behind a game-pausing menu and turned it into a physical space.

Hit a key and you'll be transported to your guild chambers, where you'll have a butler, voiced by the inimitable John Cleese, to guide you through your weapons and wardrobe while delivering

some wry commentary. Apparently Cleese's character won't just be a series of canned comments, he'll be a fully fleshed out personality who'll comment on your adventures and decisions throughout the game.

There's also a war room with a living map that lets you observe the routines of the subjects in your kingdom.

DIRTY POLITICS

Did we say kingdom? Yes, we did. Halfway through *Fable III* you'll ascend the throne to rule over Albion, and be presented with some tough choices as part of that. During your rise to power you'll be forced to make the kind of promises that wily politicians make in order to gain support.

Once your royal buttocks are warmly ensconced on the throne, you'll have to start deciding how many of those promises you're prepared to live by. Similarly, your subjects will approach you with Judge Judy-grade quarrels for you to rule on, and it'll be completely down to you whether you release the accused or demand the forcible separation of their head from their body.



Sir Galahad,
this guy ain't.

ETA
WINTER
2010



Arrows: great against flesh.
Not great against skeletons.

Adding gravitas to this interaction is what Molyneux calls the 'touch system'. Physical contact between characters is going to be an important mechanic in *Fable III*. If you send someone to the executioner it won't just be a case of waving your royal wrist and having the guards take them away. You'll be the one physically dragging them, kicking and screaming, to the chopping block.

Of course the touch mechanic can be used for positive things – relationships between players and other characters will, apparently, take on a new more meaningful dimension as a result of these extra ways to interact with each other. Not only can you drag someone to

their death, but you can hold your daughter's hand as you walk through town.

Things step up with the introduction of

an entirely new continent and one that, from the hints that have been dropped so far, won't be friendly towards Albion. We've only had scant glances at Aurora so far, but it looks like a cross between Morocco and the Middle East – a stark contrast to the Ye Olde Englande vibe that Albion has grown from.

That's not to say Albion hasn't changed, there's a much more Industrial Revolution-inspired aesthetic this time. Similarly the people have changed.

Giant Sherlock Holmes does some clue hunting.



THE LOWDOWN

- ✓ Bustling, living world
- ✓ Rule an entire kingdom
- ✓ Interesting co-op
- ✓ Improved combat
- ✗ Still no cats

THE STORY SO FAR...

LIONHEAD (THE HAMSTER)



THE START

Mark Webley, Peter Molyneux and others leave Bullfrog.



THE NAME

They form a company named after Webley's hamster Lionhead.



THE DEATH

Lionhead the hamster dies soon after the company is christened.

IN MEMORIAM

Lionhead's legacy continues in great games like *Fable III*.

1997

1997

2010

You'd think that dog would at least bark.

"Fable has evolved beyond the RPG to become a virtual society"



Fable II was a very impressive society simulator, and this is set to be true for *Fable III*. When you begin Albion is ruled by a tyrant, so the people are downtrodden and oppressed. Depending on how you rule, you can make fundamental changes to the world, such as closing factories and opening schools, and the people around you will reflect those changes, for good or bad.

GENRE BREAKER

This sounds awfully pretentious, but *Fable* has evolved beyond an RPG, to become a virtual society, one that you'll have a profound effect upon. Add to that a fluid fighting system and moral choices (and resultant physical changes) and you have what promises to be a fascinating adventure. It was something of a surprise that a flagship Xbox title would arrive on the PC during a console war, but based on what we've heard so far we're glad to have *Fable* back. **PCZ**

PLAYING WITH MATES

Correcting the Xbox's mistakes

One of the additions PC players have missed since *Fable* last appeared on the noble maths cruncher is co-op. *Fable II* on Xbox 360 did include a co-op mode, but it was a bit bum. Not so with *Fable III*.

Introduce another player into your world and they can become an integral part of your story, to the point where you can get married to your buddy and even have children with them. (Something that might get a awkward if your co-op partner is your best mate, Jim.)

You're not bound to become romantically entangled. Many people will play in an arrangement that Molyneux likens to a king and his favourite knight, and there's also the option to go into business with each other.

Whatever happens, the session's guest will always play second fiddle to the host, though that might be little consolation when your Lancelot flounces in and sleeps with your wife. Ho hum.

Fable's cosplayers went a bit overboard.



"Er... behind you?"

Taking cover behind cars is painful to watch.



FAMILY MATTERS...

MAFIA II

Steve Hogarty buys trilby, beats man to death

DEVELOPER 2K Czech PUBLISHER 2K WEBSITE mafia2game.com
PREVIOUSLY IN... Issue 217

HATS. FINE SHIRTS. Pressed trousers and spit-polished shoes. Top of the agenda during my *Mafia II* hands-on was finding a clothes shop and wrapping myself in retro threads like some mobster caterpillar before emerging a full-grown Mafia butterfly, renewed, refreshed and very smartly dressed.

The costume change isn't just purely aesthetic, the level of complexity to Mafia's police AI means that if the chasing coppers have a description of you, a sartorial swap will shake them. Similarly, if you speed by in one of *Mafia II*'s souped-up automobiles at enough of a pace to turn your characteristics into

one chisel-jawed blur, the police will track your car's license plate. Get caught and you're given the option to bribe, or to resist arrest – all while looking seriously classy.

STYLE GUIDE

2K Czech are wary of highlighting the more open-world aspects of their mid-century mob shooter – primarily to avoid drawing an immediate comparison with a little-known title from Rockstar, *Grand Theft Auto*, and secondarily because they know their game's strengths lie in its tightly scripted, directed, beautifully acted and proudly linear plot.

They're being modest, but as it happens Empire Bay is much more of a playground than the original's Lost Heaven ever was. 2K haven't hidden minigames and secrets around their city,

ETA
27 AUG
2010



You will believe a tie can flap about.

THE LOWDOWN

- ✓ Looks beautiful
- ✓ Cars handle magnificently
- ✓ Amazingly well acted
- ✓ Engaging plot
- ✗ Still has a lot to prove

"So I says to Mabel I says..."

THE STORY SO FAR...
FAMOUS VITOS



FOSSELLA
A US Republican Politician, if you can believe it.

1965



CORLEONE
From *The Godfather*. 2K Czech might've seen this film.

1969



LOGRASSO
An American wrestler, says an internet encyclopaedia.

1969

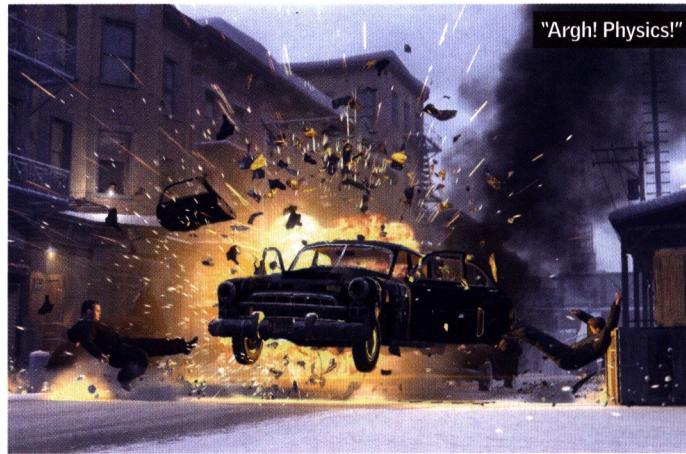


MANNONE
Arsenal goalkeeper. Guaranteed he's not from North London.

1988



Be sure not to spill a drop.



A MADE MAN'S FASHION

Sartorial advice from the time of the gangster

You can pop the hood for on-site repairs.



FEDORA

Closely-related to the trilby, this felt hat's band was useful for holding cards saying "PRESS", or in this Vito's case "MAFIA MAN".

FITTED JACKET

This jacket lacks the ultra-thin and incredibly wide lapels of the '60s and '70s, instead sticking with this timeless look.

TIE

This half-Windsor knot is ideal for the fabric of Vito's tie. Subtle patterning also stops his outfit from being too monochromatic.

but between the basic thrill of driving lovely old cars and exploring the intricate and detailed streets, there's fun to be had in simply mucking about.

This is evidenced by my swiping a fuel tanker and ploughing it through downtown traffic, sending vehicles spinning in every direction and amassing a devoted following of police cars. Later I'd repeatedly run into a fat man until he attempted to hit me, resulting in him being told off by a nearby policeman. Once the policeman had left, I'd resume the brawl on my own terms, a context-sensitive melee system allowing me to smash the man's face off nearby vehicles.

Our classy attire, I noticed, flapped around in a realistic fashion.

Eventually I'm coerced into picking up a mission, a short story that sees Vito selling bootleg cigarettes off the back of a truck, before being set upon by some greasers. The ensuing chase gives some

promising signs that *Mafia II*'s driving has been adapted to fit the keyboard – there's no tapping your way around corners, and the rolling, soft suspension of the cars as you swing around bends and mount kerbs creates a fluid driving experience akin to the original *Driver*'s.

Out of the car and deeper into the mission, I find myself exacting revenge

wood chips and broken glass, for example – can persist at any one time, and they'll continue to be affected by physics. Not only will an explosion take out any nearby goons, it'll send all the detritus in the area flying to great visual effect. Kick over a bin and the contents won't fade and instead get tossed about by the wind. It's particle magic.

Their choice of weapon, too, affects your approach. Men with automatics tend to be more wildly aggressive, demanding a cautious approach and a careful aim. Chaps with peashooters stick to the best cover they can find. There's probably an 'balls' algorithm in here somewhere, working it all out.

Mafia II is scintillatingly close to its late August release date, and this is literally the last time you'll see us writing about it without sticking a big number on the end. In its near flawless delivery of an authentic '40s-'50s American urban setting, it has already succeeded in surpassing the original in most aspects.

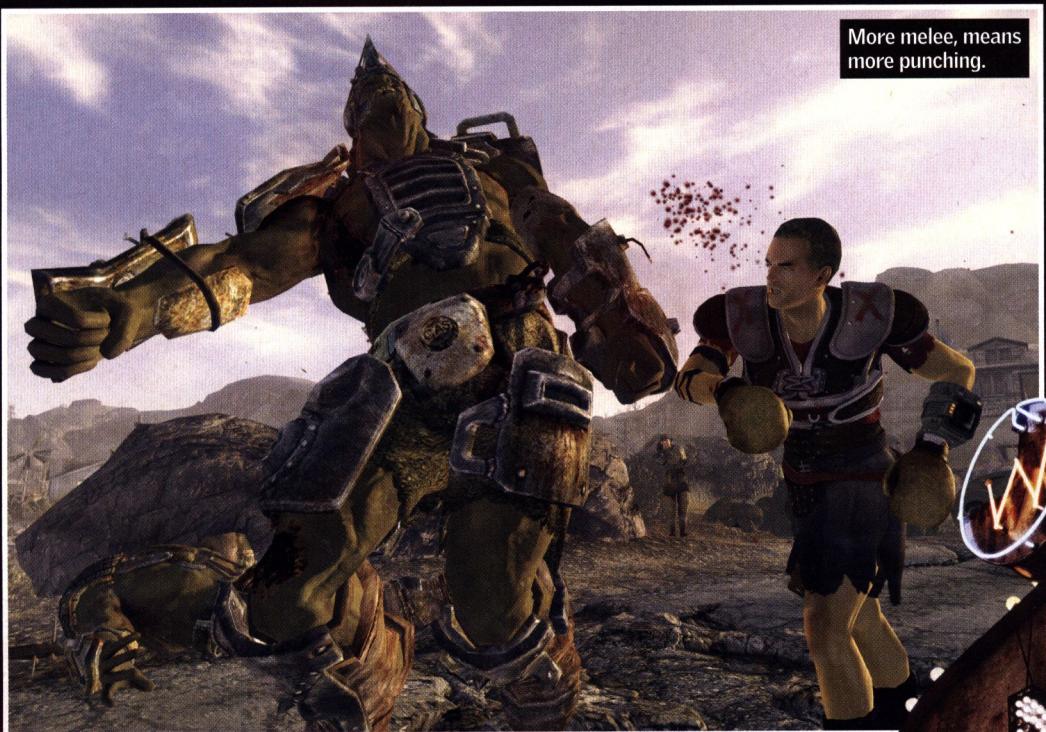
And that's good news, because a lazy comparison to the original game through posing a question like "Can it be even better than the first one?", followed by the insight-less retort of "We'll know in two months" is a perfect way to end this preview. **PCZ**

"Our classy attire, I noticed, flapped around in a realistic fashion"

by wrecking the greasers' bar – an objective almost entirely designed to show off the physics tech. Armed with a Tommy gun I fire at the wood and glass, watching splinters fly and shards scatter.

This is something 2K (and NVIDIA, who built the cleverness that powers it: a system called APEX) are proud of, tens of thousands of these particles – the

Actual combat impresses through its clever enemy AI, and though the lethality of catching a bullet forces you into a routine of running from cover to cover, the unpredictability of your opponents – specifically their penchant for peeking – their heads around corners in more than just one place – makes these violent encounters unique.



SHOOTING CRAPS AND MUTIES...

FALLOUT: NEW VEGAS

Jon 'Log' Blyth enjoys Nevada's sun, sand, and casinos

DEVELOPER Obsidian PUBLISHER Bethesda WEBSITE fallout.bethsoft.com PREVIOUSLY IN... Issue 219

OBSIDIAN IS NOT the same company that once had to give up its *Van Buren* baby.

After the apocalypse that hit Interplay and Black Isle, the plucky survivors that went on to form Obsidian have evolved, producing sequels to classic games highly regarded for their stories, yet notorious for bugs.

Neverwinter Nights 2 and *Knights of the Old Republic II* are both members of this generously adopted family. *Alpha*

Protocol (page 76) is Obsidian's difficult and awkward new birth, from a mother who possibly wasn't sure she could still have babies. Stretching this family metaphor ever further is *Fallout: New Vegas* – the glorious prodigal son.

This is a chance for Obsidian to realise some of their old intentions. The *Van Buren Tech Demo*, which was released in 2007, has entered the group consciousness of hardcore *Fallout* fans as a non-canonical extension of the lore. References to factions such as Caesar's Legion being surprisingly fleshed out for a group that didn't appear in the games.

The respect for the original games, and Obsidian's proven ability to produce sequels, makes their partnership with Bethesda seem natural, if not inevitable. And it's certainly giving the surviving members of the Black Isle team

a chance to get that *Van Buren* lore promoted to the official canon...

Fallout: New Vegas is set three years after the water purification ending of *Fallout 3*, only this time, you're on the opposite coast. There's no overlap with *Fallout 3*, no *GTA Episodes* self-referencing, because this isn't the same city: *New Vegas* tells a whole new story on the other end of America.

NEVADA HEAVEN

The location is less desolate, as the deserts of Nevada seemed like a waste of a good nuclear missile.

As a result, we see Vault 21 converted into a leisure location, the elaborate structures of Vegas remain intact, and there's enough electricity to waste on slot machines. There's even a clear blue sky.

Our new hero – whoever he or she turns out to be in your hands – is a courier, shot in the head before making a delivery. Left for dead, but picked up by a doctor, the character creation scenes take place in his surgery. You won't have to go through the enjoyable – but perhaps overlong – introduction of *Fallout 3*, where you lived the first 19 years of your life in instalments. The GOAT exam has been replaced with word association tests and Rorschach blot analysis. So you can respond to a butterfly with "a big explosion" and get advised to put your skill points in heavy weapons.

First up in the new hands-on, and we're given a tour of Las Vegas' Strip. It's not the Strip you might know and love from *CSI*. *Fallout's* world serves up

THE LOWDOWN

- ✓ A whole new world
- ✓ A whole new cast
- ✓ A dinosaur called Dinky
- ✓ Improved role-playing bits
- ✗ No major gameplay tweaks

THE STORY SO FAR...
OBSIDIAN
ENTERTAINMENT



KNIGHTS OF THE
OLD REPUBLIC II
It's a classic sequel
to a classic game.

2005



NEVERWINTER
NIGHTS 2
Another sequel to
another classic.

2006



ALPHA PROTOCOL
Their first original
game. Not as amazing
as their sequels were.

2010



FALLOUT:
NEW VEGAS
The boys and girls go
back to sequelsing.

WINTER 2010

ETA
WINTER
2010

He'll shoot
whoever farted.

Stand still while I plan
where to kill you, thanks.



Fake money casinos –
slightly less than thrilling.

**"New Vegas
tells a new story
on the other end
of America"**



➔ a Vegas stuck in the '50s – slightly more polite (at least on the surface). Granted, there are three girls enjoying themselves in a fountain. I'm assured that the rather oddly posed girls haven't been finalised yet, but it's safe to say: Bethesda's engine has a way to go before it convincingly reproduce *Girls Gone Wild* videos.

There are four casinos and the converted Vault 21. We head into Tops Casino to play blackjack, roulette and slots. It sounds fun, but videogame casinos are never as much fun as the real thing. We chat to the owner, who's looking for entertainment, and accept a mission as a talent agent. But we don't have time, as I'm told to go on a trip.

"I'm assured the oddly posed girls haven't been finalised"

So, I'm warped to Novac. That sounds hopeful. 'Novac' sounds like it's named after a sense of hope, technology, and aspiration. A spirit of can-do rebuilding and unity. As I walk up the barren hill to get there, the real reason for the name becomes clear: it's less of a town, more of a motel where the No Vacancies sign has been vandalised. When we see the sniper sitting in a dinosaur's mouth, it suddenly becomes a little less welcoming. Even if the dinosaur is called Dinky.

Novac is guarded by two men, who take it in turns to sit in the mouth of the 20ft high wooden dinosaur. Dinky faces the Vegas Strip we've just warped in from, and although this motel is free

In the future, children will be drunks and happy.

Not all the vaults are as stuffy as 101.

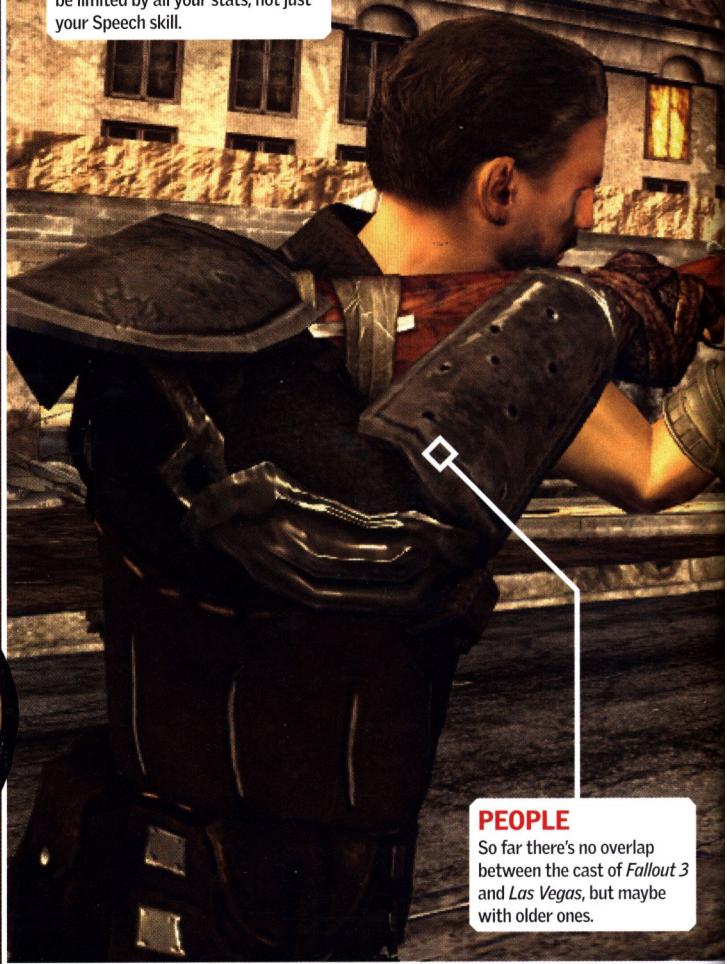


WHAT'S NEW?

New Vegas uses *Fallout 3*'s engine, so it's instantly familiar. The best way to think of *New Vegas* isn't as an expansion, but a new, fully-formed and full-length story. Here's a list of what's new:

RPG CONVERSATIONS

Your conversational options will now be limited by all your stats, not just your Speech skill.



PEOPLE

So far there's no overlap between the cast of *Fallout 3* and *Las Vegas*, but maybe with older ones.

of faction allegiances, we can pick out more points of interest in our surroundings. Camp Forlorn

Hope nestles up a hill and to the East. A bit West, and we've got Camp

Nelson, operated by Caesar's Legion and their boss, Dead Sea. Then there's the mostly defunct power plant, Helios One.

I'm told somewhere around here is a town dominated by strong mutants, and ruled by a transvestite called Tabitha.

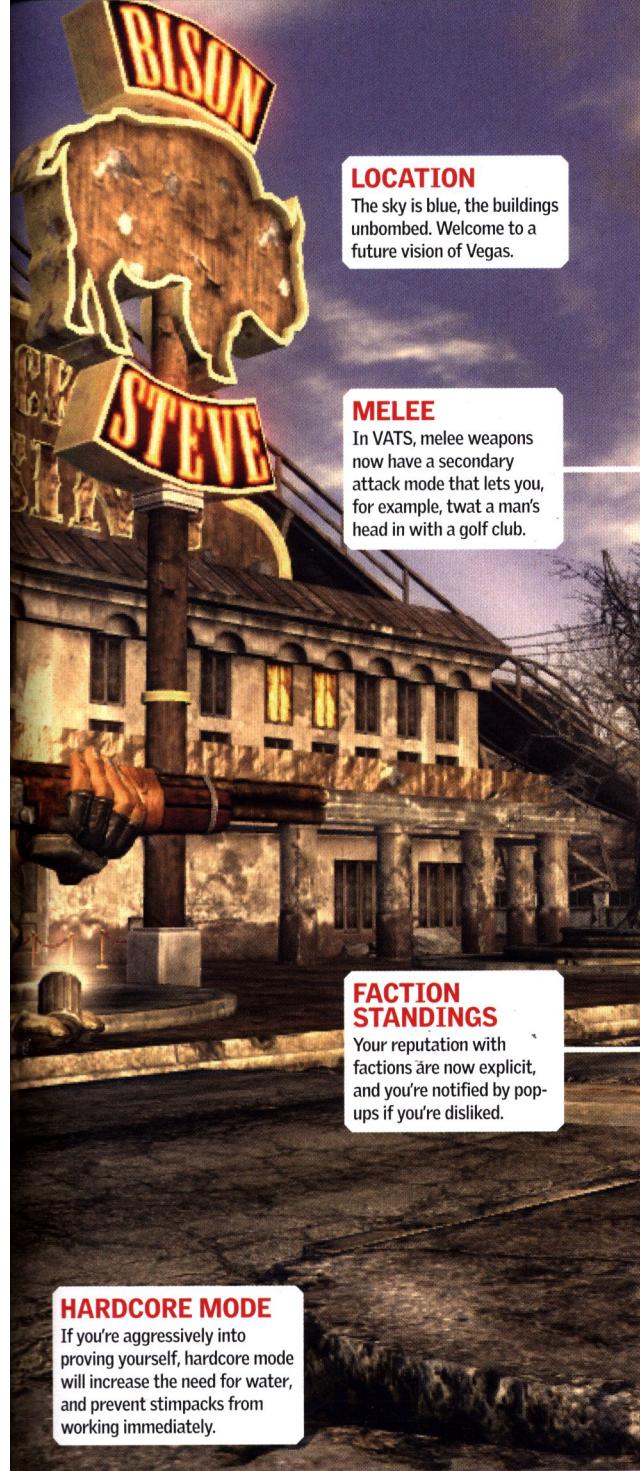
Intrigued, I ask whether she's one of the camp ones, and whether she's a mutant herself. I'm told to imagine

Elton John in his hey-day, which I take as an emphatic yes to both questions.

Let's not get ahead of ourselves. First off, I'm checking out that 20ft dinosaur. There's a door in Dinky's left flank, which opens into a gift shop. It's manned by Manny Varga, a whining, sphere-headed moustache of a man, whose attention is focussed on his plush Dinky mementos. With some conversation, you can get him to open the rest of his stock to you, which includes – usefully – guns, stimpacks, and ammo. The dinosaurs, it turns out, are free. Manny Varga is a bad businessman.

THE MISSUS

A staircase leads up to the left, and we join Craig Boone at his outpost. His wife is missing, he says. She's been taken, sold. She's dead. It's a strange scenario



LOCATION

The sky is blue, the buildings unbombed. Welcome to a future vision of Vegas.

MELEE

In VATS, melee weapons now have a secondary attack mode that lets you, for example, twat a man's head in with a golf club.

FACTION STANDINGS

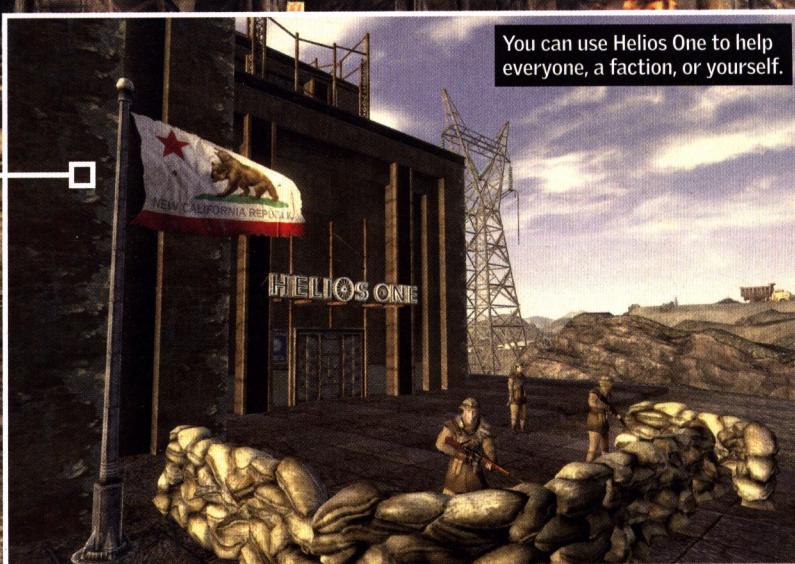
Your reputation with factions are now explicit, and you're notified by pop-ups if you're disliked.

HARDCORE MODE

If you're aggressively into proving yourself, hardcore mode will increase the need for water, and prevent stimpacks from working immediately.



This move is called Fore! Their exclamation point, not ours.



You can use Helios One to help everyone, a faction, or yourself.



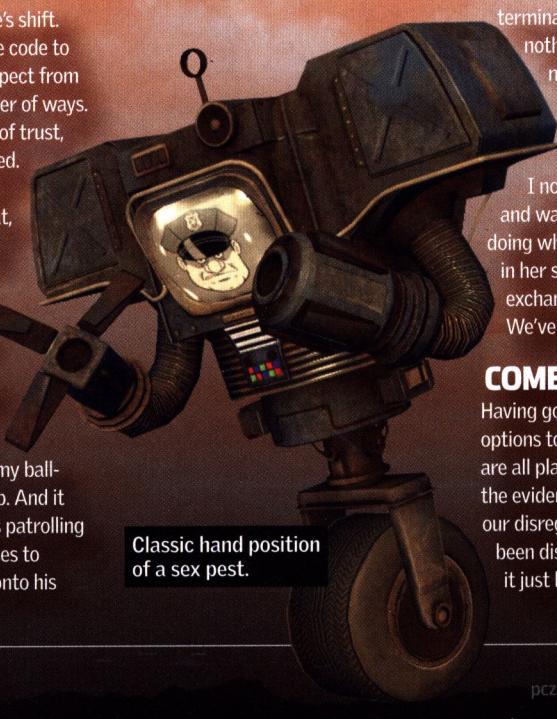
Looks like Helios One is up and running.

that no-one will explain to me: why would you buy someone you're going to kill? Corpses make terrible slaves. They're notoriously lazy.

Nevertheless, my position as an outsider makes the paranoid Boone trust me. We make a deal. I'll find out who did it, and take him or her in front

of the dinosaur during Boone's shift. I'll wear his beret – that's the code to tell him to shoot. As you'd expect from *Fallout*, this could go a number of ways. Boone's put me in a position of trust, and trust is there to be abused. I could invite anyone I want dead out there, put on my hat, and they'll get sniped to bits.

That's assuming I've got the verbal skills to convince Boone it was the right person afterwards. I decide to take the noblest route, and find out who really did it. This involves talking to everyone. It's not my ball-shaped friend in the gift shop. And it doesn't appear to be Boone's patrolling partner, although he confesses to hating Boone's wife. I log onto his



Classic hand position of a sex pest.

terminal to make sure, but it contains nothing but a story-building email: nothing incriminating.

Jeannie May Crawford, the keeper of the motel, protests her innocence, too. But

I notice a safe behind her counter, and wait for her to go to bed before doing what spies do – rummage around in her shit. I find one record of an exchange of money for one wife. We've got our bitch.

COME ALONG

Having gone through due process, the options to get Boone to join my gang are all plain sailing. If we hadn't found the evidence, he'd have been appalled at our disregard for justice. If I'd been dismissive, and said I did it just because I didn't like



UPFRONT HANDS-ON

✓ her, he'd have come at me with that sniper rifle.

But Boone is on my team now, so my choice of where to go next is limited. He's a dyed in the wool New Californian Republic dude, he lives for the two-headed bear. If we head over to the Caesar's Legion Fort Nelson, his shameless NCR regalia will be enough reason for them to open fire on us. So, it's over to Fort Forlorn Hope.

IT AIN'T BUTLINS

It's not in great shape. The ongoing skirmishes between themselves and Nelson are creating heavy casualties, and those that aren't dying from severed everything are starving to death. Major Polatli is pacing the largest tent. His moustache is fuller, prouder and altogether more deliciously military than gift shop guy, and he needs help.

His missions take us into the path of combat, which gives me a chance to experiment with the new companion radial. *New Vegas* gives you the chance to take more control of your teammates. So, I could tell Boone to hang back while I investigate the Caesar's Legion camp, tell him to switch from melee to ranged

weapons, stay passive, or plunder his inventory or equip him with guns.

First, we're despatched to Quartermaster Hayes, who informs us of a few rations that have been lost by the Helios One power plant. This is a spot of location foreshadowing – we won't get into Helios One at this stage, but it's a big building, and at some point, we'll get her back up and running. How will we use it? Will we use it to boost our standing with the factions? Use it for the common good? Or, as one of the screenshots shows, use it to power a devastating space weapon?

Karma still exists alongside a new faction system, so your choices may affect you in more ways you're used to.

Secondly, we have to help out the doctor. He's a bit brusque but he's soon won around with our conversational skills. This is another feature: we don't charm him using a generic Speech skill, we convince him we're the man for the job using our Medical skill.

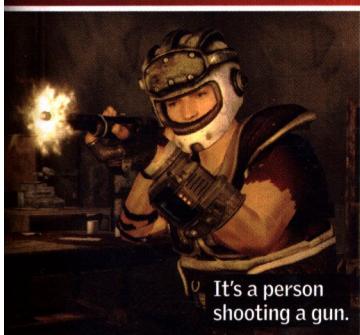
It makes sense: all the charisma in the world won't help you chat knowledgeably to a doctor if you don't know what an appendix is. And more importantly, it makes sense in terms of



"Hey, I was shaving my legs with that!"



Fantastic what bullets can do when you level up.



It's a person shooting a gun.

The Major's final request brings the game's new factions to the forefront. In *Fallout 3* and its downloadable content, your standing with certain groups was never made explicit. You knew your behaviour was somehow going to be remembered, but nothing ever popped up to say "The Brotherhood Of Steel Are Now Fond Of You". Now, they do.

REACHING A HEAD

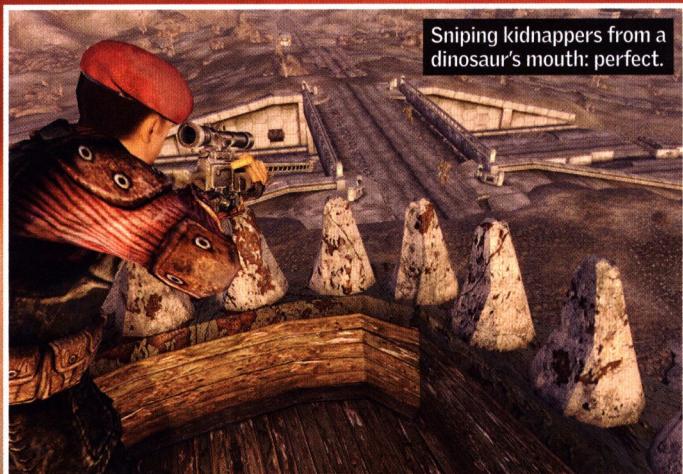
Whether that's a good thing or not depends on your taste: I'm not keen on too many hidden statistics, and I'm willing to sacrifice the illusion of humanity for another set of numbers to manipulate. You might disagree, and you'd probably be a more complete human if you did.

I'm also encouraged to try out the new melee attacks. Up-close combat wasn't terribly compelling in vanilla *Fallout 3*, but most of the intimate weapons now have a unique option in the VATS system – you can aim it at a certain limb, as usual, or choose that



FACTION REPLAY

The return of *Fallout* to former Black Islers means there'll be plenty of fan pleasing references. Not least of which is the return of two factions. The all-pre-apocalypse-American New California Republic known to players of *Fallout 2*. The semi-official lore of *Van Buren* has them at war with Caesar's Legion, a group who reject the senators and congressmen of the NCR for an empire-based approach. *Van Buren* concept art has them riding chariots, with horses replaced with the bonnet of a car. This conflict started in the 2050s, so there's decades of bad blood by the time of *New Vegas*, so you'd hardly be playing the game if you didn't take a side.



Sniping kidnappers from a dinosaur's mouth: perfect.

role-playing skills. The explosives expert might not let you near his bomb unless you can demonstrate a knowledge of what does and doesn't blow up.

So, while the good doctor goes for a walk around, I tend to his patients. There's comedy here – one guy's amputation goes slightly too well, with the amputation of an unexpected limb – but I imagine things could be even funnier if I wasn't such a damn good doctor. I'd have liked to have left behind a room full of mutilated guys and some apologies on Post-It notes.

"New Vegas will be a sizeable slice of story cake"

weapon's special attack. The 9 iron has "Fore!", which lets you take a powerful, slow swing at your enemy – and it's perfect for taking out the enemy's dogs. It's strange – I'm a dog lover, so I tend to hate it when I'm asked to shoot one. But hitting them in the face with a golf club don't bother me at all. Perhaps I'm more of a monster than I thought.

RE-VAULTING

So, will you be able to win the affections of both factions? It doesn't look like it. We've gone from tolerated to hated with Caesar's Legion in just a few minutes and a handful of kills. Grow a pair and choose a side. It looks like you'd

be wise to choose a side and stick to it, or be hated by both teams.

For those who enjoy being punished, a new hardcore mode will faithfully recreate the scorching desert heat, forcing you to stay hydrated in the scorching desert heat. It's the final tweak to a familiar template that'll please those determined to wring one last play out of the game.

New Vegas is also a chance for those die-hard *Fallout* fans to see what happened to their Black Isle dreams. For these people, and everyone else, *New Vegas* will be a sizable slice of story cake, from people who've waited seven years to tell their tale. **PCZ**

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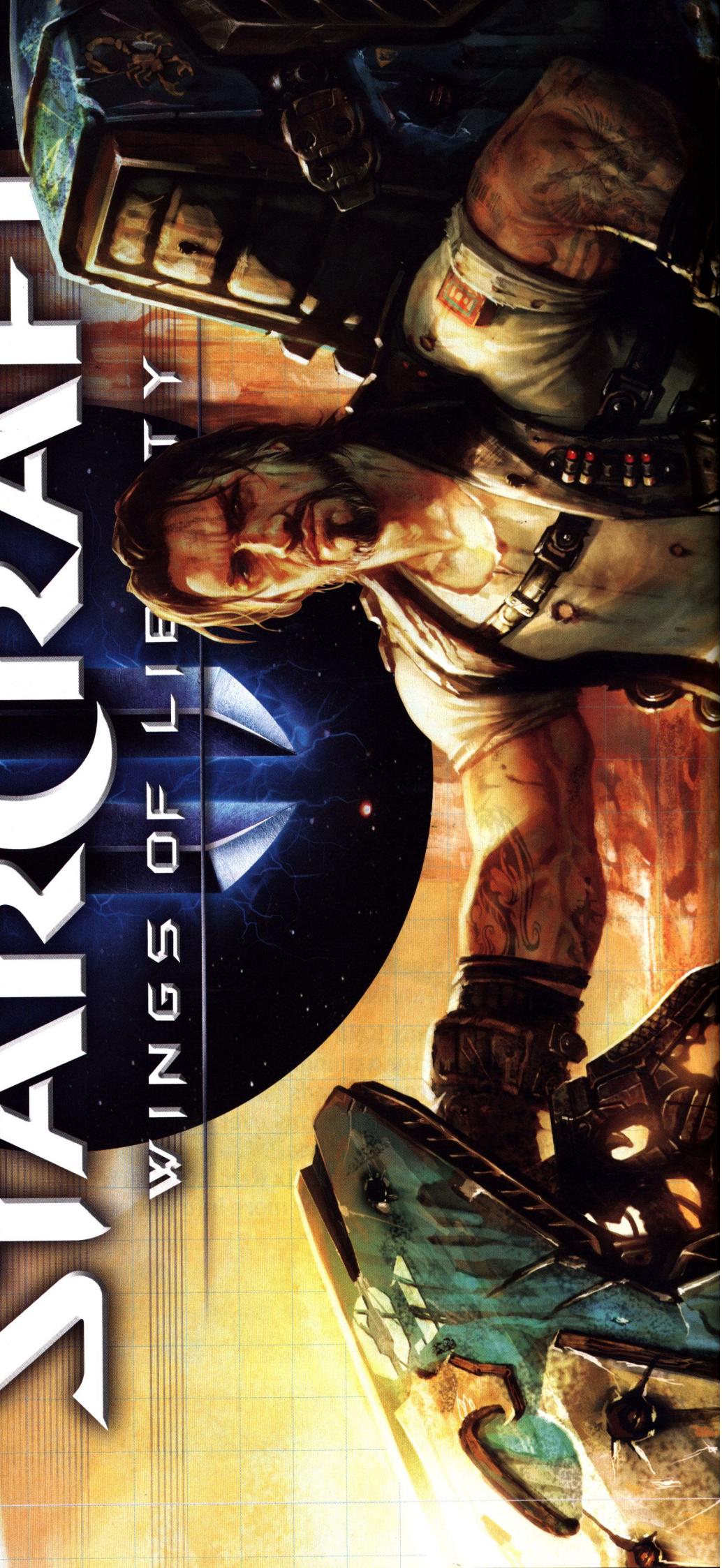
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PC ZONE – Last one to subscribe is a grubby pair of cheap iPod earphones

UPFRONT FEATURE

LOOKS WHO'S BACK...

TERMINATOR 2 WINGS OF LIFE





William J. Haley peels back the final layer of Blizzard's RTS masterpiece as it nears its unleash date

DEVELOPER Blizzard Entertainment PUBLISHER Activision Blizzard WEBSITE starcraft2.com

EXPECTATIONS. IN SOME ways *StarCraft II* can never hope to live up to them. After 10 years we're expecting several moons on several sticks, and for the multiplayer to be more than simply a refined and classic *StarCraft*, with shinier explosions and prettier Zergs. But that's exactly what Blizzard is delivering. It's the biggest case of 'if it ain't broke' in recent memory, and we're thankful for it.

Their beloved RTS has, after all, become the national e-sport of an entire country, and the familiarity found in its online play isn't necessarily a bad thing – *StarCraft* remains one of the most balanced and finely tuned gaming experiences available.

At the other end of the spectrum, *StarCraft II* might just be the most exciting single-player PC game in recent memory. Personally, it wasn't the multiplayer side of *StarCraft* that drew me to the series to begin with. It was Kerrigan's harrowing betrayal and subsequent transformation into the Queen of Blades, set against a gritty space saga where soldiers talked with country accents and cigars hung from their mouths as they incinerated onslights of Zergs.

The multiplayer aspect of *Wings of Liberty* may be rigidly fastened to its heritage, but the single-player campaign is bursting with fresh concepts and high production values which will raise the standard for storytelling in RTS games. But, according to *StarCraft II*'s creators, this hasn't been picked up by the beta testers.

"I feel like there's a lot of players using the beta as a demo for *StarCraft II*," says lead developer Chris Sigaty. "But the beta's not intended for that in any way. It's focused on helping us get that balance right for release."

Sigaty took our allotted interview into overtime to discuss what he strongly feels is one of *StarCraft II*'s greatest accomplishments: "We randomly invite people in, they go and play the beta, and they come away judging the product as: 'Oh, it's just this hardcore thing.' But this single-player campaign is our best effort yet of bread-crumbing a player through a very casual experience, if that's what they want it to be. Or, as casual as real-time strategy can be; better tutorials mean better abilities to teach the player what they need to do if they want to step into the multiplayer game."

The importance of splitting the single-player campaign into a trilogy becomes apparent: *StarCraft II* isn't just about telling an epic story too small for one retail package, but also about delivering an RTS game that anyone can pick up and play. Especially in this console-centric era, RTS games seem to have been branded with an scarlet letter by mainstream gamers. *StarCraft II* is looking to rectify that stigma by being to resource gathering and attack-moving what *World of Warcraft* is to questing and sexy elves.

"If there's a message we're trying to give here, it's to those people who are going into the beta and finding it's hardcore; that's just a small part of the *StarCraft II* package."

ETA
27 JULY
2010

WHAT'S IN THE BOX?

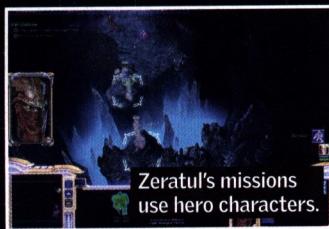
It wouldn't be a modern Blizzard release without an excessive Collector's Edition



Wings of Liberty's CE is a goodie box of *StarCraft* collectibles. As it won't cost an arm and a Hydralisk tusk like Activision's other collector's editions, this is definitely the version we'll be picking up at the midnight launch.

- *The Art of StarCraft II: Wings of Liberty* is a 176-page book featuring artwork from the game.

- An exclusive 2GB USB flash drive replica of Jim Raynor's dog tag, which comes preloaded with the original *StarCraft* and the *Brood War* expansion set.
- A behind-the-scenes DVD containing over an hour of developer interviews, and cinematics with director's commentary.
- The official *StarCraft II: Wings of Liberty* soundtrack CD, containing 14 tracks from the game along with exclusive bonus tracks.
- *StarCraft* comic book issue #0, a prequel to the comic series published last year by DC Comics' Wildstorm.
- A *World of Warcraft* miniature Thor mecha in-game pet. Can be applied to all *World of Warcraft* characters on a single Battle.net account.
- Exclusive Battle.net downloadable content, including special portraits for Battle.net profiles, decals to customize units in-game, and a visually unique version of the Terran Thor unit.



Zeratul's missions use hero characters.

“I think ultimately we've struck the best chord yet with the game, giving a little bit of everything, or a lot of everything, for everybody. We know that there are a lot of gamers out there that enjoy the single-player side, and don't want to go out there and fight.”

In addition to the story missions, Blizzard has implemented a series of Challenges to further test the skills of players. These span all three races making them perfect for honing one's skills before throwing down a gauntlet on Battle.net. The few on show required a limited combination of classes to efficiently withstand increasingly difficult waves of enemies.

THE LOWDOWN

- ✓ The best single-player in an RTS, ever
- ✓ Slew of awesome features to keep players busy
- ✓ Kerrigan returns, after 12 years
- ✓ *Galaxy Map Editor* will give massive modding freedom
- ✗ Occasionally stiff voice acting and animations
- ✗ Stale multiplayer

This setup successfully fosters a more intimate understanding of individual units and could lead to tighter games online and off. Each Challenge can be completed with a Bronze, Silver, or Gold medal, and tie into *StarCraft II*'s achievement system which touts hundreds of objectives.

The single-player achievements focus on completing the optional objectives in each level, usually on normal or higher difficulty levels. It isn't an original set of achievements, but it should keep devotees busy while Blizzard prepares the Zerg-focussed *Heart of the Swarm* for release.

If achievements aren't your thing or you use your ungodly clicks-per-minute to master them in the first week, the *Galaxy Map Editor*'s possibilities and



Voodoo dolls: the Terrans' secret weapon.



That may not be the best tactic.

StarCraft's community will help round out an undeniably exhaustive package.

“The stuff I expect to see from custom games is going to be crazy,” says Sigaty, “The guys on the team made *The Lost Viking* arcade [a minigame in the Battleship Hyperion's cantina] in two weeks. It's a top-down shooter, like *Raiden* or *I942*, and it's absolutely crazy. And it's all done in *StarCraft II*'s engine.”

Tucked away in the current build were a handful of Protoss missions which Blizzard were still reluctant to talk about. Although there are 29 missions in *Wings*' campaign, five don't involve Jim Raynor and his crew. After returning from a mission a third of the way through the game, a meeting between Raynor and Zeratul aboard the Hyperion occurs (see page 69). Upon examining a device Zeratul has

“Tucked away in the build were a handful of Protoss missions”

STORY SO FAR...
STARCRAFT NOVELS

THE DARK TEMPLAR SAGA
A trilogy linking the first game to its sequel starts.



2007

FIRSTBORN
The synopsis of this book is too epic to even utter aloud.



MAY 2007

SHADOW HUNTERS
Possessed archaeologist Jake Ramsey's adventures continue.



NOV 2007

TWILIGHT
Edward can tell something is up with Bella – er, hang on...

JUNE 2009

RESEARCH OPTIONS

Choose your path wisely; there is no turning back



PROTOS RESEARCH

1. **TECH REACTOR** Combines the functionality of a Tech Lab and a Reactor in a single add-on.
2. **ORBITAL STRIKE** Barracks units now arrive by drop pods. These land at the Barracks' rally point.
3. **RAVEN** Support unit that can detect cloaked and burrowed enemy units.
4. **SCIENCE VESSEL** Support unit that sees cloaked and burrowed enemy units.
5. **AUTOMATED REFINERY** No longer requires SCVs to harvest.
6. **COMMAND CENTER REACTOR** Lets two SCVs to be trained simultaneously.

7. **ORBITAL DEPOTS** Supply depots can be built instantaneously.
8. **MICRO-FILTERING** Refineries and Automated Refineries produce Vespene Gas (one of the two main resources) 25% faster.
9. **ULTRA-CAPACITORS** Weapon upgrades in the Armory and Engineering Bay increase attack speed by 5%, in addition to increasing damage.
10. **VANADIUM PLATING** Armour upgrades in the Armory and Engineering Bay increase health by 5%, in addition to increasing armor.

with him, the player is sucked into the Dark Templar's memories. These side-missions aren't afterthoughts - they start with a five-minute sequence where Kerrigan makes her return. These are a great influx of variety from the usual Terran missions, and a pat on the head for Protoss fans eagerly awaiting *Legacy of the Void*, the third part of *StarCraft II*.

But playing the Protoss isn't the only way that Blizzard have involved them in a single-player campaign.

ZERG RESEARCH

1. **HIVE MIND EMULATOR** Structure that can permanently mind control Zerg units.
2. **PSI DISRUPTOR** Defensive structure that slows all nearby Zerg units.
3. **CELLULAR REACTOR** Specialist units gain +100 starting energy and +100 maximum energy.
4. **REGENERATIVE STEEL** Ships and vehicles slowly regenerate health.
5. **PREDATOR** Anti-infantry specialist with a powerful area attack.
6. **HERCULES** Massive transport that can deploy its cargo almost instantly.
7. **PLANETARY FORTRESS** Command centers can be outfitted with the Twin Ibiks Cannon.
8. **PERDITION TURRET** Flame turret that conceals itself when out of combat.
9. **SHRIKE TURRET** Outfits all bunkers with an automated turret.
10. **FORTIFIED BUNKER** Bunkers gain +150 health.

Blizzard have revealed the game's research system, which will have a drastic impact on your gameplay.

Each mission has a number of optional objectives which are revealed at preset times. If it's your first time through a mission, you're going to have to manage your assets efficiently to compensate for these surprises. Or you could just stay the course and not destroy the extra enemy bases or rescue stranded Terrans, but this inaction costs the ever-precious

research points earned by completing each bonus objective. After you've got at least five Zerg or Protoss research points it's time to start climbing a research tree. Each has two options at each interval (five, 10, 15, 20, and 25 points), but only one can be had, as it locks out its counterpart.

"The Terrans are very clever and not at all above stealing what they can't invent," says lead designer Dustin Browder. "But unlike tech purchases where,



KEEPER OF THE LORE



CHRIS METZEN
VICE PRES. OF CREATIVE DEVELOPMENT

Chris Metzen – the man behind the mythos of Blizzard's flagship titles – has big plans for *StarCraft*

Q It's been over a decade since the last *StarCraft* game. What have you been excited about getting back to?

A At one level, even in the first *StarCraft*, we always had this big Xel'Naga theme looming behind it all. There was this mythos at work. So *StarCraft* is essentially about these three races fighting against each other, and a couple of lonely people being caught right in the eye of this storm, while these events spiralling around them.

I mean at the root of it all, past all the grinding mythologies and celestial conflicts between ancient species *StarCraft* is just about this boy and this girl. That was what I wanted to chase. But beneath all of that there's this much larger thing playing out, and I love that: the big, ancient threat from the past coming full circle and endangering the future.

What makes Raynor and Kerrigan different?

Historically in videogames we writers tend to chase the mighty and the clever. Just bad-ass, incorruptible heroes that don't have a whole lot of dimensionality. But they're just bad-ass, and give the impression of being superheroic. We tend to chase hooks that are these big, mighty set-pieces.

But they don't always have an emotional component beyond the supra-epic or the supra-angry or the supra-whatever. But *StarCraft* is really a story of unrequited love.

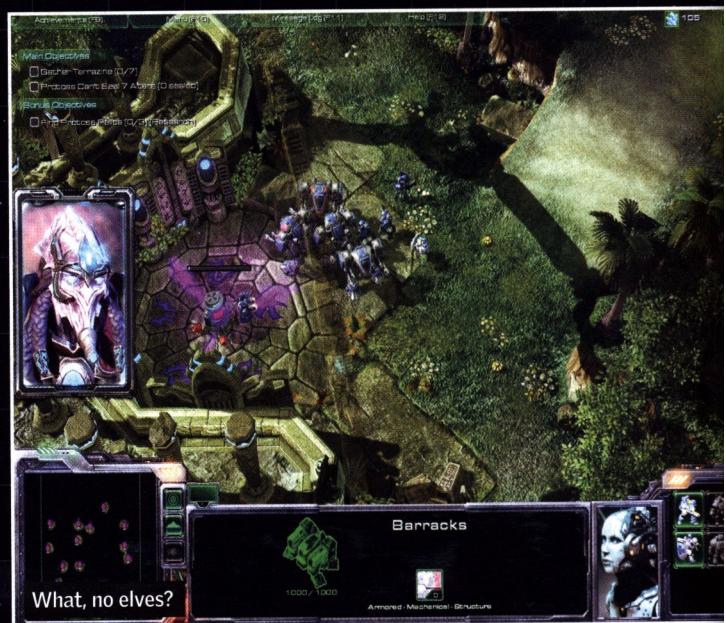
How did you go about making this love story real?

All these different elements within Blizzard came together: our cinematics group, our cinematics

director Nick Carpenter, the art director Sam, the designer Dustin, we just started vibing this thing out. It was the craziest thing; we've never really had a story like this in our products, and we'd never come together at a team level this way, surrounding an idea or a theme. It spilled out into every part of the game. Getting everybody bound around one story and wringing out every drop of resonance we could from it was really cool. It was a hell of a thing to be part of. I hope we get to keep doing that.

As a writer, what do you aim to bring to videogames?

Clearly there are a number of outfits that are killing it in terms of storytelling, just really going into some spaces that aren't the same old thing. And I wanted to get Blizzard into that space. I want to conjure moments that have real emotional resonance, and *StarCraft* offers this, almost more than any franchise we have. And I wanted to see if I had it. I don't know much about myself as a writer, but I wanted to see if I could tell this story.



This laser drill can be used as a weapon.

By the end of the game, you can buy just about everything you want in the armory, here you'll only going to get half the things on any playthrough. We've worked really hard to make these some tough choices."

To some extent, Blizzard was successful in offering two very powerful options, although it rarely feels as though the choice is an impossible decision – like choosing between Megan Fox or Adriana Lima.

Due to *StarCraft II*'s open-ended missions and upgrading mechanics, your chosen playing style and selections in the armory can also be major factors in deciding which research path you should take. For example, if you've unlocked and powered up a lot of single-target weapons, like the Yamato Cannon and the Banshee Strike, large single units, like Ultralisks, aren't a cause for concern, but swarms of

MISSING IN ACTION

These features aren't dead, they're just sleeping



Blizzard is working to ensure the retail code is as full of features as possible, but even with all their resources and a long development process a chunk of content won't make the cut in time. "Some of the most-requested features really come down to the professional league," says Canessa. "And some of the things that we wanted to do for release, we aren't ready to do yet. We've had lots of requests around the replay sharing, which unfortunately won't make it in, so that will be coming out in the next few months after the game is out. And then there were some requests around tournaments. That's really where we've gotten a lot of feedback on things that we're not ready to release yet."



"Even the smallest of *StarCraft II*'s features is worth being excited over"

Zerglings can easily overwhelm your forces. In this case, the Psi Disruptor, a structure which slows down all nearby Zerg enemies, is the perfect complement to your arsenal.

On the other hand, if you've focused on Siege Tanks and Firebats Zerglings won't get remotely close to your base, so the Hive Mind Emulator would allow you to take control of units like Ultralisks. Since Ultralisks spawn more units, it'll be interesting to see what sort of possibilities the Emulator

unlocks for sneaky players.

In the gaming industry, blockbuster releases are often much more than the sum of their parts. Other than the been-there, done-that multiplayer, even the smallest of *StarCraft II*'s features is worth being excited over. Many have scoffed at the idea of having to pay three times for what they see as one game, but the naysayers will be hushed once they step onboard the Hyperion and they'll begin to enjoy what's less a game and more of an event. **PCZ**

THE BATTLE.NET MAN



GREG CANESSA,
BATTLE.NET PROJECT
DIRECTOR

Greg Canessa, ex-PopCap front-man and the mind behind Xbox LIVE, talks about *StarCraft II*'s Marketplace

Q PopCap publishes games from smaller developers. Can devs expect that to happen with the *StarCraft II* mods and the Marketplace as well?

A We certainly hope so. I'm not exactly sure whether it's going to be filled with content from using the *Galaxy Map Editor* or the mod creation community, or whether the devs will be individuals and fans, or if it's going to be small companies. I think there could potentially be an opportunity for both.

What does *StarCraft II* offer devs and modders then?

The content creation tools we're providing as part of the *Galaxy Map Editor* are the richest and most fully featured we've ever released at Blizzard. Moreover, the map publishing stuff that we're doing around Battle.net – the seamless transition where you're able to hit a button and upload your stuff to Battle.net and then share that with the community – is pretty cool. We've also invested a lot of time in Battle.net in terms of data-driven interfaces and lobbies and such, so that the system morphs to adapt to mods and maps without Battle.net or Blizzard touching those interfaces. I certainly hope that people identify that as an opportunity and go after it.

"This is the company other companies in gaming aspire to be"

Do you have a plan for what will be on offer in the Marketplace?

We're going out without a business model when the game's released, so

you have the ability to create content and then publish it, but not really against any kind of business model. That will be generated at a later date, so it'll be interesting to see how the industry and how fans adapt to that once we release Marketplace after the game's released.

What was it like coming to Blizzard recently?

It's been a wild ride, but really awesome. Most of Blizzard's executive team has been here for 15 years or more. There are some that've been here for 19 years. And they rarely bring senior/executive folks into the company, period. So I'm one of two or three that they've ever done.

The culture is super-collaborative and consensus-building. There's a lot of tribal knowledge, there's a lot of the "Blizzard Way," which you have to acclimatise yourself to. I think that's one of the more challenging aspects of it: You weren't around, so you just have to ramp up on not only the culture, but the decision-making process, etc.

Blizzard sounds like an unusual place to work.

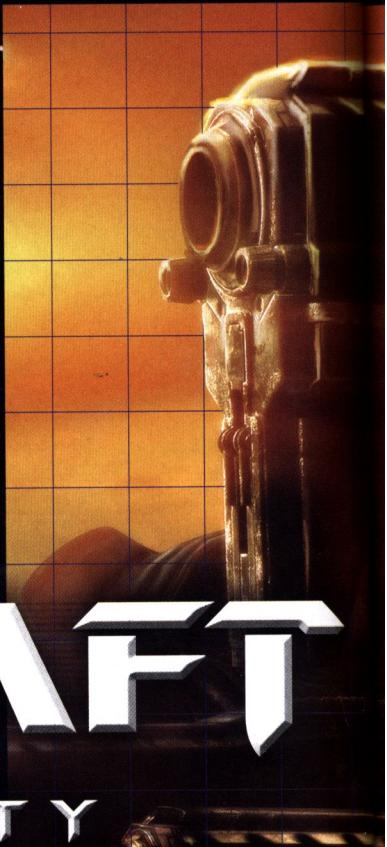
There are a lot of differences in terms of how Blizzard is run, managed, operated and maintained from other companies I've worked at. But it's all for the better, because in many ways this is a company that has gotten things right. This is the company that other companies in the gaming industry aspire to be.



THE BLUFFER'S GUIDE TO

STARCRAFT

WINGS OF LIBERTY



**Lose your original *StarCraft* CDs?
Too lazy to play it?
We've got you covered...**



THE ORIGINAL GAME, set in the Koprulu Sector of space, was like a Greek tragedy with spaceships. It had murder, betrayal and death, followed by yet more betrayal and death. By the end of *StarCraft*, and its expansion *Brood War*, most of the original heroes had been killed off.

Four years after the United Earth Directorate's failed attack and subsequent retreat from Char, the Zerg homeworld by Jim Raynor and the Protoss, the genocidal Zerg are dormant and eerily quiet.

As Raynor lies embittered and despondent, the Protoss Zeratul returns to him with an ominous message: in the future lies oblivion, and there's only one hope – the infested human and leader of the Zerg, Sarah Kerrigan. Confused? Of course you bloody are. Read on.

STARCRAFT: HARD WORDS

TERRANS Humans.

GHOSTS Terran psychic troops who use sniper rifles.

CEREBRATES What you're called when you control the Zerg.

ZERGLINGS Easy and cheap-to-create Zergs. Essentially, dogs from your nightmares.

ZERG RUSH The creation of a large amount of zerglings, which then, en masse, attack the enemy base, overwhelming it.

KEKEKE A commonly-used laugh in *StarCraft*.

THE TERRANS

Humanity at its least civil



The humans of the *StarCraft* universe are far from perfect. They began as the tainted winners of the Guild Wars under the Human Confederacy, and end the game broken into the United Earth Directorate and the Dominion. The former is based out of Earth and attempts to keep humanity's rule of the galaxy intact. The larger, stronger and more aggressive faction, the Dominion, is headed by Emperor Arcturus Mengsk I.

This grumpy southerner has a penchant for monologues, and has a bloodlust that led to the destruction of the original Confederacy at the hands of a demented Zerg army.

On the outskirts of this mild civil war lies Raynor's Raiders, a ragtag band of mercenaries selling banned alien artifacts to the shadowy research organisation The Möbius Foundation.

The Dominion remains the dominant Terran power.

ARCTURUS MENGSK

Mengsk started *StarCraft* as part of a band of extremists, The Sons of Korhal who fought against what he considered a tyrannical Confederacy.

After banding together with Jim Raynor and Sarah Kerrigan (his second-in-command), he helps band together several colonies, before discovering the psi-emitter – essentially Zerg bait. He used the emitter on the Confederacy's homeworld of Tarsonis to lure billions of Zerg to the planet, destroying its defences.

Mengsk then betrayed Kerrigan, leaving her for dead as the planet was ravaged by the aliens. With the Confederacy in ruins, Mengsk formed the Terran Dominion.

You can't trust this guy: typical politician.

JIM RAYNOR

Born and raised on the planet Mar Sara, Raynor began *StarCraft* as a local marshal, until he refused a command from the Confederacy to destroy a Zerg-infested command centre and was arrested.

Freed by Mengsk, he helped the Sons of Korhal liberate colonies, eventually attacked the Confederacy, and fell in love with Kerrigan. That is until Mengsk betrayed Kerrigan and Raynor failed to save her.

Four years later, Raynor lives on the Battlecruiser Hyperion with Raynor's Raiders, making money by selling illegal alien artifacts to scientists. He begins *StarCraft II* a bitter man: his family and friends mostly dead, he has no money, and little to live for beyond beer.

He's brought back into the fold by the Dark Templar Zeratul, who tells him that the end of the universe is near unless he works with Kerrigan once more.

Jim Raynor: unluckiest man in the universe?

STAR CRAFT
WINGS OF LIBERTY.

A Protoss. Make up your own jokes.

THE PROTOSS

Goofy, bipedal shamanistic xenomorphs



Created millennia ago by the Xel'Naga, the alien race that also made the Zerg, the Protoss are introduced in *StarCraft* as an enemy that wrought utter devastation on any colony the Zerg attacked to stop further infestation.

The Conclave, the main power of the Protoss species, sent Commander Tassadar to look into the Zerg threat. He happened upon Zeratul, the banished and supposedly evil Dark Templar.

In discovering the Dark Templar's ability to destroy Zerg cerebrates Zeratul both discovered their secret

and led the angry, spiky aliens to infest the Protoss homeworld of Aiur with an Overmind (the controlling force behind Zerg swarms).

Tassadar sacrificed himself to destroy the Overmind, while Zeratul and the remaining members of the Protoss escaped to the Dark Templar world, Shakuras.

Eventually, the remaining Conclave attempted (and failed) to betray the Dark Templars, leaving them as the dominant faction of the Protoss.

With no more Conclave, but rival tribes vying for power, the Protoss begin *StarCraft II* splintered and in the midst of a civil war.



ZERATUL

Nomadic, mysterious and somewhat baffling, Dark Templar Zeratul is a mighty force. The Dark Templars' strength comes from the darkness the Zerg are borne of, making them extra powerful and doubly moody.

Through the events of *StarCraft*, Zeratul had to kill the Dark Templar matriarch, Raszagul, leaving him mentally scarred and somehow moodier.

On a mission some time after the events of *StarCraft*, he happened upon Samir Duran who was

creating Zerg/Protoss hybrids, and was warned of a coming apocalyptic darkness. When *StarCraft II* begins he contacts Jim Raynor and tells the Terran to unite with Sarah Kerrigan once more, handing him a Xel'Naga artifact and warning him of their return.

Zeratul's place in the game is to reconcile the differences of the warring Protoss tribes, in the hope that their rage will be quelled and the their entire species won't get wiped out. Again.

THE OTHERS

The figures who sit outside factions

Can you hear something?

THE VOICE IN THE DARKNESS

The void – a cold, dark and unholy place – holds many mysteries, including the source of the Dark Templars' power, and the creature that the Xel'Naga imprisoned on the Dead Star KL-2.

Before *StarCraft II*, a Möbius research team, led by a talented psychic, accidentally unleashed The Voice. Most of the team was killed before The Voice went head-to-head with the Protoss Dark Templar Xy'Tal, who sacrificed himself to destroy it. However, rumour has it that The Voice still exists.



SAMIR DURAN

Samir Duran appeared during in the *Brood War* expansion as an advisor to the UED's Admiral DuValle, but eventually tricked him into killing his old friend Alexei Stukov, and revealed himself as a Zerg spy.

However, in one of the last missions of the game, Zeratul found Duran on an uncharted planet, splicing Zerg and Protoss DNA. On questioning, he revealed that he was millennia old, that Samir wasn't his real name, and that all of this time he had fooled Kerrigan into believing he was a loyal servant.

Ominously, and leading into *StarCraft II*, he referred to the hybrids as a "completion of a cycle... preordained when the stars were young".

More ominously still, he revealed that he had planted many thousands of his hybrids across the universe, and that Zeratul has no way to get to them before they all hatch.

THE ZERG

Spiky alien bug-creatures from Hell



The Zerg are an alien race somewhere between insects and the Tyranids of *Warhammer 40,000*.

While most people know them by the snake-like Hydralisks, they're actually created out of larvae, and controlled by The Overmind (a booming voice in their heads) and Cerebrates (slightly less booming voices in their heads that are controlled by The Overmind).

Zerg infest, spawn and multiply at frightening rates, allowing them to overwhelm countless human colonies before the Confederacy can react.

Now, with The Overmind dead and its two attempts to regenerate failed, Sarah Kerrigan leads the Zerg from their new-found home on the planet Char in the Koprulu sector, the stage on which *StarCraft* was set and *StarCraft II* is launched.

SARAH KERRIGAN

Kerrigan was a talented Ghost, gifted psychic and crack shot, trained by the Confederacy. Eventually she defected, joining the Sons of Korhal with Mengsk and seeking the eradication of the aforementioned tyrants.

When Mengsk used her to prime a psi-emitter to lure the Zerg upon Tarsonis, Kerrigan was left for dead, but she wasn't killed. Instead The Overmind, sensing a delicious psychic, put her in a chrysalis and turned her into a Zerg Queen. Possibly due to the huge spindly arms coming out of her back, Kerrigan then took the name 'The Queen of Blades'.

On The Overmind's death she was freed, and helped Dark Templars and Jim Raynor to fight The Dominion and the attempted rebirths of The Overmind.

Several backstabs and murdered bit-part-characters later, Kerrigan turned on the Protoss and Raynor, uniting the Zerg into a formidable swarm once more. Kerrigan beat the UED, Protoss and Raynor when they attacked her on Char, but let them escape for no apparent reason.

In *StarCraft II*, Kerrigan has gained insight into the future, and has seen the coming of the Xel'Naga.

THE XEL'NAGA

While Blizzard hasn't revealed much about what these things are, what they're doing, or why they're coming back, it's apparent that they won't be friendly.

Through a process of trial and error the Xel'Naga created the Protoss and the Zerg – known as the Purity of Form and Purity of Essence respectively, and what The Overmind referred to as "opposite facets of a greater whole."

Samir Duran's experiments with Zerg-Protoss hybrids at the end of *StarCraft* could be leading to the rebirth of the Xel'Naga.



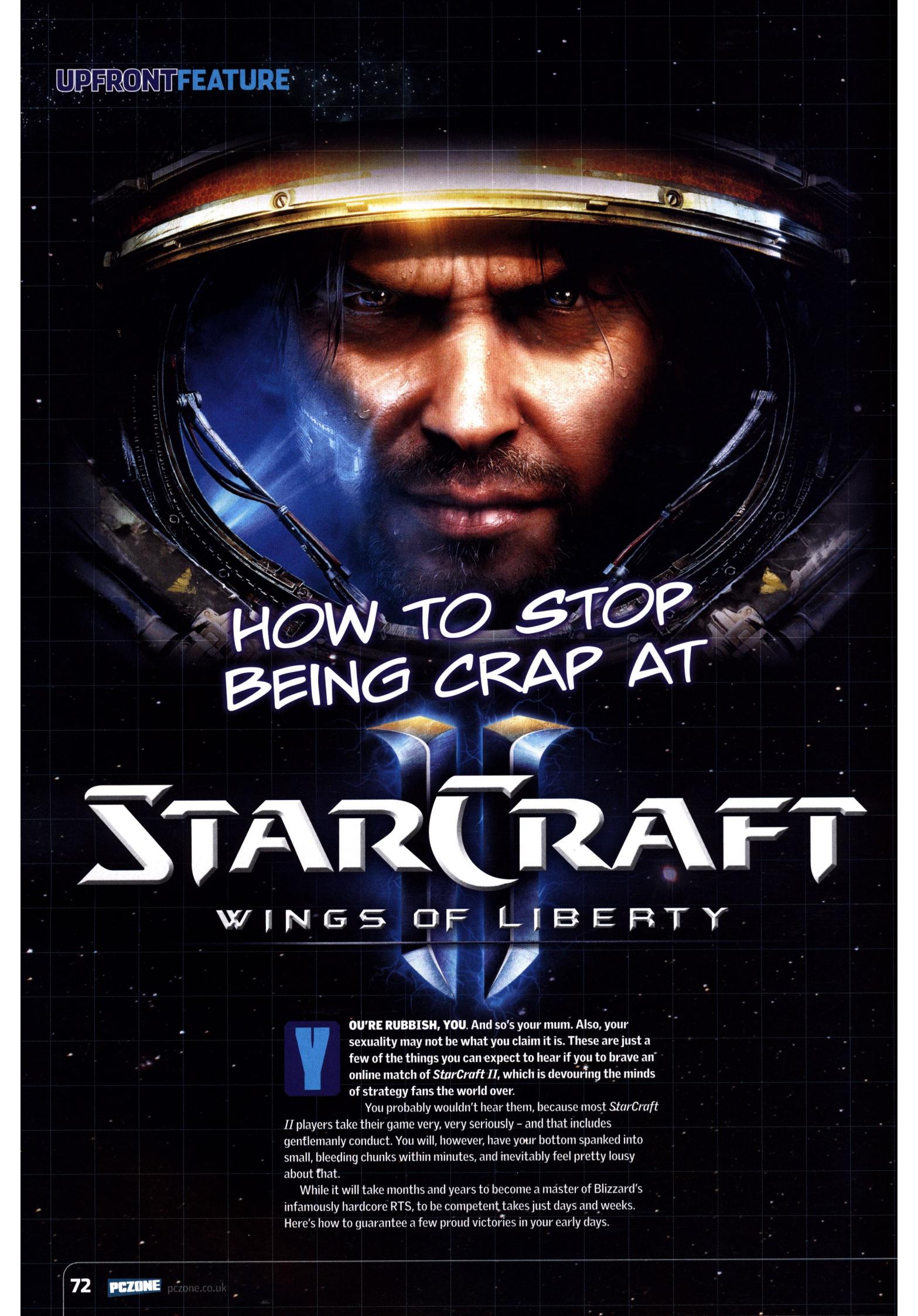
+



A mix of Zerg...

...and Protoss.

"Possibly due to the huge spindly arms coming out of her back, Kerrigan took the name 'The Queen of Blades'"



HOW TO STOP BEING CRAP AT

STARCRAFT

WINGS OF LIBERTY



OU'RE RUBBISH, YOU. And so's your mum. Also, your sexuality may not be what you claim it is. These are just a few of the things you can expect to hear if you to brave an online match of *StarCraft II*, which is devouring the minds of strategy fans the world over.

You probably wouldn't hear them, because most *StarCraft II* players take their game very, very seriously – and that includes gentlemanly conduct. You will, however, have your bottom spanked into small, bleeding chunks within minutes, and inevitably feel pretty lousy about that.

While it will take months and years to become a master of Blizzard's infamously hardcore RTS, to be competent takes just days and weeks. Here's how to guarantee a few proud victories in your early days.



I. ADAPT TO SURVIVE

The single most important piece of advice is to base your build order on your enemy's build order. To do this, you need to learn to scout – this means sending out a Drone, Probe or SCV right at the start of a match to spy on what the other guy's building, and to question why he's building it. You need to recognise every unit type on sight, and build accordingly.



4. TRY A ZERG RUSH

This technique's known as the 8-Pool. Don't morph any Drones, but get up a Spawning Pool up as soon as you hit 200 crystal. Next get a couple of Drones in, then an Overlord, then go hell for leather on morphing Zerglings. Once you've got six, charge the enemy base, aiming for a major structure. Have two more hot on their heels, and ready a Queen and a Roach Warren next.



7. USE YOUR KEYBOARD

You need to keep building while fighting, but setting up build queues takes time. But you can do it without taking your eye off a fight by using hotkeys to select a production building and queue a unit. For instance tapping H and then Z gets you a Zergling in a millisecond, while pressing B then A delivers a Terran Marine. Far faster than mousing around the map.



2. RINSE, REPEAT

While you're scouting, you need to be starting off your economy. There are various strategies for this, but your first move should always be to set your Gatherers onto Crystal deposits. Make sure they don't all cluster around one or movement will be slowed. Vespene Geysers can come a little later, depending on your build order. Whatever you do, though, don't stop building Gatherers.



5. BEAT A TURTLE

If you think you're facing off against a turtling (heavy defence) player, you're often best cutting off his expansion rather than trying to crack his shell. With cheap units, harass the crystal/gas deposits near him to stop him claiming them while you're building your main army, and he'll struggle to build a fat enough force to hold off your eventual big guns.



8. MOMENTOUS MACROS

Each race has at least one very cheap manually activated temporary ability that boosts something significant. The Protoss Chrono Boost will make a selected building 25% faster, the Terran Mule can grab crystals at triple normal gather speed, and the Zerg Queen can spawn extra larvae. These are not optional toys: you need to be activating one every couple of minutes.



3. DON'T BE A MISER

If you have money in the bank, you're wasting it. Your crystal and vespene gas reserves should rarely pass about 200, so spend, spend, spend. There is always an upgrade or some sort of unit limit increases that you can buy. Also resist queuing multiple units up, as that leaves money you could spend instantly on something else floating in limbo.



6. STICK TO THE PLAN

Learn and practice a variety build orders. An on-the-fly hotchpotch will never work: you need to pick a plan in the early stages of the game and commit to it. Think in terms of specific forces rather than having to have one of everything (eg ground assault or anti-air). Again, this should be based on what your scouting suggests the enemy is building.

FURTHER READING

The best *StarCraft II* research you can do is to watch replays of your matches and watch what your enemy does throughout, so you can ape them in your next relevant game. You can also download expert players' replays from sites like screplays.com and sc2win.com

As well as that, you should keep visiting wiki.teamliquid.net. This site holds strategy and tactics guides for the original game, and is quickly becoming the definitive *StarCraft II* strategy wiki.

The current motherlode, though, is The High Definition StarCraft Community's YouTube channel (youtube.com/hdstarcraft), which offers pro commentaries on matches. Half of the videos will be incomprehensible at first, but you'll quickly pick up advanced strategies and *StarCraft*-specific lingo.



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PCZONE

Reviews

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PC.ZONE's dirty protest. If a game is bad, we won't shirk our duty.**ON THE DVD**

Good news! Check out the cover DVD for a playable demo or movie.

**ONLINE ONLY**

Don't have an internet connection? Then don't waste your time with this game: it won't work without one.

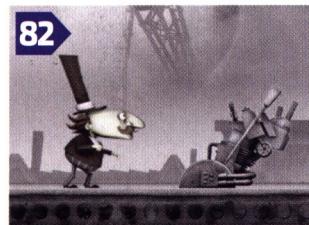
**EXPANSION PACK**

See this and you're going to have to get the original game first. We know, but life's not fair.



76 ALPHA PROTOCOL

Is it the Jason Bourne, James Bond or Austin Powers of the spy game genre?



82 MISADVENTURES OF P.B. WINTERBOTTOM

Bum jokes abound in bizarre puzzler about a pie-hunting time bender.

86 SERIOUS SAM HD: THE SECOND ENCOUNTER

The next best thing to *Duke Nukem* comes back for more.

89 I'M NOT ALONE

The most terrifying thing about this survival horror is its price tag.

83 THE WHISPERED WORLD

The clown with the most annoying voice in the world tries to end it.

87 SONIC RACING SECRETS OF THE MAGIC CRYSTAL

Mixes *Team Fortress 2*, an MMO and jetpacks. Shame they forgot the fun.

84 SPLIT/SECOND: VELOCITY

Brum-brums and boom-booms mix in this rather great-looking racer.

88 GLOBAL AGENDA

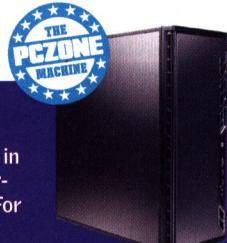
Mixes *Team Fortress 2*, an MMO and jetpacks. Shame they forgot the fun.

92 BUDGET

94 BUYER'S GUIDE

The PCZONE Machine

As you'll see on the many pages of resplendent reviews that follow, we list the minimum specifications you need to play each game in each review. Please refer to the publisher's website to check out their recommended optimum specs that'll make the games super-whizzy. We review all new games on a variety of systems, including our top-spec, very desirable Xworks X81-C17 (pictured right). For more info on Xworks, head down to the internet and type the following into your browser: xworksinteractive.com.





ALPHA PROTOCOL

David Brown is Bourne again...

DEVELOPER Obsidian Entertainment
PUBLISHER SEGA
WEBSITE seg.co.uk/alphaproto
ETA Out now
PRICE £34.99

ONE OF THE core tenets of modern game design is to make things simple for the player. Sometimes this goes too far and a title will be too easy, lacking the need of any real skill to complete it. Often the reverse is true, and obtuse decisions causes anger, frustration and vented internet spleens. Few games manage to do both, but that's exactly what *Alpha Protocol* achieves, simultaneously driving you crazy while easing you along. The latter point isn't as horrible as you might imagine, allowing you to progress with pleasing speed to the game's best parts: the story elements.

Obsidian have always been excellent storytellers and they haven't bucked that trend with *Alpha Protocol*, crafting an exciting, intriguing spy thriller plot with interesting (if occasionally stereotypical) characters. It's all standard espionage fare, but that doesn't stop it being compelling all the way through.

You play as Michael Thornton, a promising young secret agent recently brought into the *Alpha Protocol* organisation, who do deniable operations all over the world, kicking terrorist arse in the name of Uncle Sam, Aunt Oprah and inbred Cousin Cletus. Along the way

you'll meet a whole host of shifty characters, all of which respond differently to your chosen vocal stance.

WINNING FRIENDS

The conversation system has been marketed as one of the big things about *Alpha Protocol* and it doesn't let the game down. One person might like you playing it cool and sophisticated, while another could respond badly to this approach, preferring you to be professional and direct. Each conversation is made that much more

interesting because you only have a limited amount of time to decide what your response will be.

Although you can try to figure out how each person will react to you when you meet them, you can purchase and find intelligence on them, giving you a briefing into their background that contains clues as to what's the best way to manipulate them.

At first, you'll probably be snapping up as much intel as you can, but you'll soon realise it's

AT A GLANCE...

Third-person spy thriller melds an exciting plot and tons of good ideas with a frankly bizarre combat system.

MINIMUM SYSTEM REQUIREMENTS:
 2.4GHz processor, 1GB RAM (2GB Vista), GeForce 6800GT or ATI 1300XT graphics card or better. Internet connection required for online activation.

HOW IT STACKS	DEUS EX	94%
	NO-ONE LIVES FOREVER 2	93%
	ALPHA PROTOCOL	74%

"...I can do that myself."



I accept your terms. Do not harm my men,



Love the Castro look.

a waste of money. The best equipment costs a bomb, so you're better off saving up for that.

The missions are pleasingly varied in their structure. Each area you get sent to, starting off with Saudi Arabia, is built around a central hub of a safe house. Each house has the same stuff in it: a TV to keep you abreast of the latest news, mementos from your missions you can interact with, and terminals which grant access to a black market weapons and kit shop, intelligence you've discovered and so on.

JOB HUNTING

When you leave through the front door you get to choose which mission to do next, adding a semblance of non-linearity to proceedings. While there's more than enough regular forays into enemy territory, there are also plenty of missions where there's no combat at all, and the focus is entirely on dialogue and moving the plot on.

The missions structure is very well designed, expertly changing the pace to keep you interested and not ground down by constant "go to A, hack PC, proceed to B, kill boss" quests. The mission variety is symptomatic of how Obsidian have approached making this game, with lots of welcome touches colouring your experience.

Something that isn't well done is the combat, which works best if you don't use it at all.





"Thorton is the worst shot in spying history"

Thorton is the worst shot in spying history. To call the right mouse button's action "precision aiming" is grossly inaccurate. At least, it is unless you wait for a few seconds for little red crosshairs to appear, which might let you get an accurate shot. Try that in a blazing gunfight and see how much fun it is, remembering that you'd need to do this after every single shot.

This is utter developmental insanity and you wonder how a game with so much in its favour could get something this fundamental so incredibly wrong. It's nearly enough to make you want to

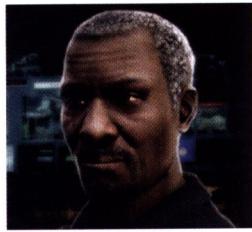
cut your own throat with the game disc (which isn't needed after installation, as SEGA's DRM is limited to a one-time online activation). Thankfully combat does get better, when you realise that actually trying to fight foes using your own skills as a gamer is the wrong approach. Instead you need to use gadgets (grenades, traps, etc.) and, most importantly, Skills.

For example, don't bother aiming manually with a pistol. Just use the Chain Shot Skill instead. This *Conviction*-style mark-and-execute ability slows time and allows you to place a series of shots.



CONSPIRACY THEORY

Plenty of different factions play a role in the story



ALPHA PROTOCOL

Your employers are a secretive US espionage organisation led by one Yancy Westridge. Don't make fun of his name, he doesn't like it.



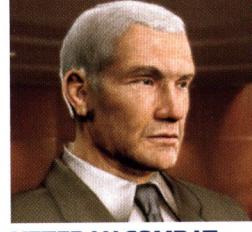
AL-SAMAD

These guys are US-hating terrorists - *Alpha Protocol*'s equivalent of Al-Qaida - who blow up a plane using fancy rockets in the opening cutscene.



HALBECH CORPORATION

An arms company whose stock is falling after the US government started to look elsewhere for its guns.



VETERAN COMBAT INITIATIVE

The VCI are involved in some shady dealings across the globe and have deep links with the Halbech Corporation.



G22

Your contacts in the G22 organisation are Albatross and Sis, the first a mysterious unknown and the latter a mute punky girl.



HI-YAH! Chop-socky Bourne-dom

Hand-to-hand combat plays a role in *Alpha Protocol*, but not as much as you might have thought. It's one of the abilities you can assign experience to and can be fun to use, even if it tends to just involve hammering one button a lot. Our advice is to save that XP for something more useful.

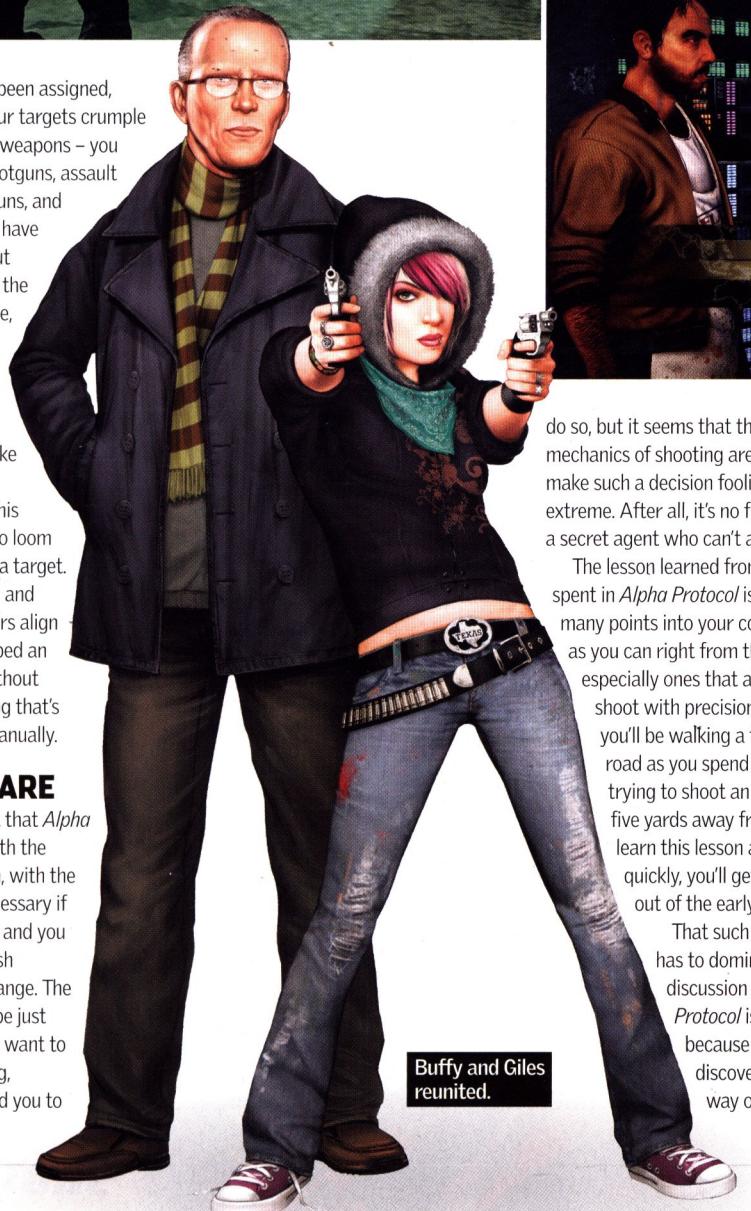


Once all marks have been assigned, time unravels and your targets crumple to the ground. Other weapons – you have the choice of shotguns, assault rifles, sub-machine guns, and the odd sniper rifle – have their own abilities, but none are as useful as the Chain Shot for precise, silent kills.

Another useful pistol Skill is the precision shot from cover. Working just like the normal crappy aiming mechanism, this time you don't have to loom out of cover to mark a target. Hold the right button and watch those crosshairs align and bam, you've popped an enemy in the face without being seen. Something that's very difficult to do manually.

OPEN WARFARE

There is an argument that *Alpha Protocol* was built with the pistol as the core gun, with the others only really necessary if Hell has broken loose and you need to just spam-rush enemies from close range. The game isn't meant to be just about stealth – if you want to just go in guns blazing, Obsidian have allowed you to



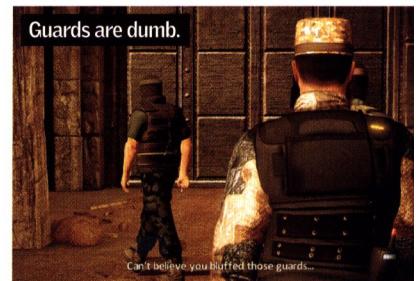
Buffy and Giles
reunited.



do so, but it seems that the very mechanics of shooting are designed to make such a decision foolish in the extreme. After all, it's no fun being a secret agent who can't aim properly.

The lesson learned from the time spent in *Alpha Protocol* is this: whack as many points into your core attributes as you can right from the get-go, especially ones that allow you to shoot with precision. If you don't, you'll be walking a frustrating long road as you spend 10 minutes trying to shoot an enemy who's five yards away from you. If you learn this lesson and apply it quickly, you'll get a lot more fun out of the early sections.

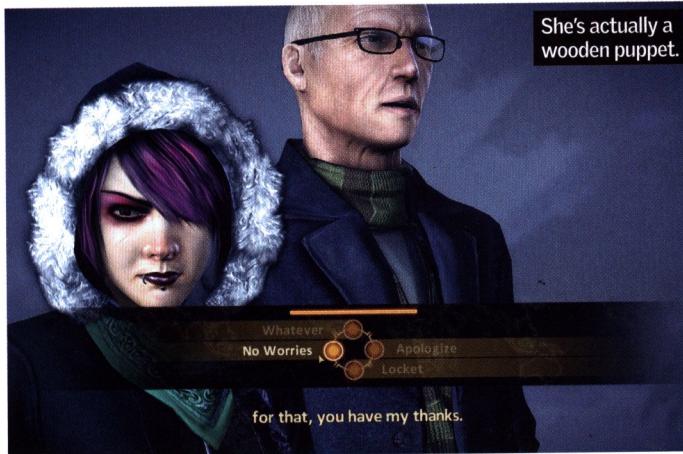
That such negative talk has to dominate any discussion of *Alpha Protocol* is a shame, because once you've discovered the right way of playing



everything begins to click into place, which makes the flaws so damnable and frustrating. The combat system isn't the only problem. If it was, this game would be in Classic territory. Sadly, there are some glaring problems that keep breaking any suspension of disbelief.

Foremost among these is the terrible AI of your enemies, which is erratic. Enemies are capable of spotting you through brick walls, but sometimes they won't react to you dancing around in front of them. It's infuriatingly inconsistent.





"Alpha Protocol could've been an astounding game"

especially if you're one of those people who likes to complete levels without being detected. You'll never know what triggers the guards.

As well as this, they have a tendency to fight with the scenery, delivering brutal melee attacks to walls or objects that get in their way. There's also the usual array of generic AI issues, like foes standing out in the open and just waiting around to be shot.

This might be a personal thing, but it has to be mentioned: the Unreal Engine 3 is creaky, and isn't good enough to do justice to a game, leading to the nagging suspicion that *Alpha Protocol* could have

been an astounding game had it not been shackled by the old tech.

STICKY WALLS

Visually things can look hopelessly drab, with some ugly wall textures jarring. Thankfully, faces and characters during conversation scenes are acceptable, so there's some good news, at least.

Using Unreal Engine 3 also means there's a grotesque and fiddly snap-to-cover system that doesn't work. As mentioned, you can still be seen and even shot through said cover, so it is basically irrelevant. But yeah, that's the current fashion, so it just has to be in there.

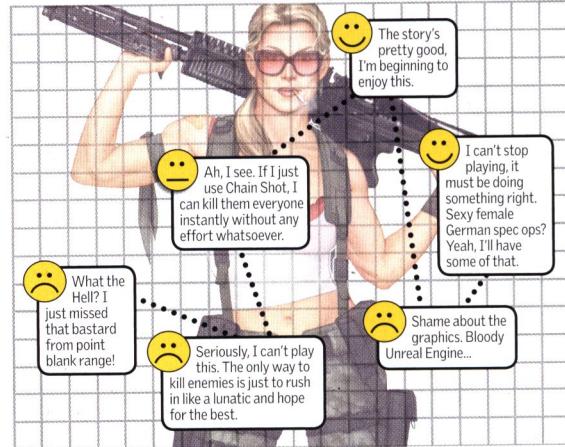
LOVE/HATE ROLLER-COASTER

Emotional responses to *Alpha Protocol*

GOOD TIMES

ON THE FENCE

BAD TIMES



Tense.



combat, the AI and the creaking old graphics engine. Once you've done that – admittedly this is very difficult to do for the early sections – there's a superb spy game to adore here.

That exhilarating core deserves more than the pretty rancid crust that tops it, but if you can stomach that, you'll have one of those games where, in five years time you'll find people going, "Actually, I really like *Alpha Protocol*. Sure it had its problems, but..."

PCZONE

GRAPHICS Ugly and old
SOUND Good voice-acting
MULTIPLAYER None at all

- ✓ Engrossing story
- ✓ Lots of good ideas
- ✓ Varied missions
- ✗ Combat can be a chore
- ✗ Dated graphics
- ✗ Rubbish AI

74

Must Spy Harder

PCZONE pczone.co.uk

...VRO
OOO
MPH
HHH...

That's the sound of the **FAST BIKES**
'Sportsbike of the Year'
passing its competition

Sportsbike of the Year 2010: The Verdict

On sale 02.06.10 - don't let it pass you by



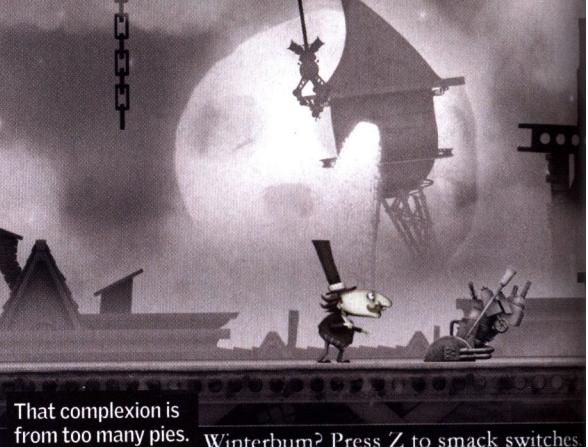
In Association With
BRIDGESTONE



What happens when a clone has an umbrella.



Applesauce and Marmadukes! What peculiar counting!



That complexion is from too many pies.

Winterbum? Press Z to smack switches.

RECOMMENDED
PCZONE

Creepy 2D water.

Spot the pie.



THE MISADVENTURES OF P.B. WINTERBOTTOM

Jon 'Log' Blyth strives for a Greedy Bottom

DEVELOPER The Odd Gentlemen, 2K China
PUBLISHER 2K

WEBSITE winterbottomgame.com
ETA Out now
PRICE £3.99 (Steam)

I'M TOLD THE author of *PB Winterbottom* doesn't like his game being compared to *Braid*. This is frustrating, because a *Braid* comparison would've been a great shortcut to help me describe what *The Misadventures of P.B. Winterbottom* is like. It's presented simply yet stylishly, is full of childlike elegance, and even tops *Braid* by being far less convinced of its own importance.

The Mr P.B. Winterbottom in question is a notorious pie thief: a man so intent on devouring the tarts of the world, that he'll bend time to do it. Chasing a magical, lady-like pie through a dream-like terrain, he develops a simple recording technique: holding Shift records his actions and releasing button causes a clone of Winterbottom to appear and continually replay those actions in a loop until being interrupted or dying. Jabbing a clone with your umbrella will cause it to go flying – and recording a clone doing the jabbing can be used to catapult yourself.

This is a simple enough setup, but over the game's 50 main levels, every facet of that process is explored and

used to solve a problem – such as the looping of a recording where Winterbottom drops should he die.

Winterbottom doesn't twist your mind as comprehensively as *Braid*, but it does reproduce that all-important swing from confusion to inspiration required for great platform puzzlers. Basically, it makes you feel clever.

MR CHILLYBUM

Apart from the recording mechanic, every world introduced has a twist – strict time limits, pies that only your clones can collect, limitations on where you can start clones, or a spotlight that activates pies – that all add a new slant on the game, and keep you intrigued through the two or three hours it takes to complete the game.

There are things I don't like about *PB Winterbottom*. The poetry between the levels leaves me stone cold, for starters. And even for me, a self-declared connoisseur of the puerile, the reliance on the humour of the words "bottom" and "bum" overshoots childish glee and lands the game firmly in the realm of developmentally challenged.

But with a large range of bonus levels that challenge your timekeeping and efficiency, a leaderboard that'll leave you wondering what you're doing wrong, and a price tag that's very generous for the satisfaction provided, *The Misadventures of P.B. Winterbottom* is essential for those who like a sit down and have a think. **PCZ**

AT A GLANCE...

A premium pie-plundering platform puzzler with a time-travelling twist. Jesus, alliteration is shit, isn't it?

MINIMUM SYSTEM REQUIREMENTS:
2GHz processor, 512MB (768MB for Vista/7), and a 128MB GeForce 6200 or Radeon X1300 graphics card.

HOW IT STACKS

BRAID 90%

WINTERBOTTOM 84%

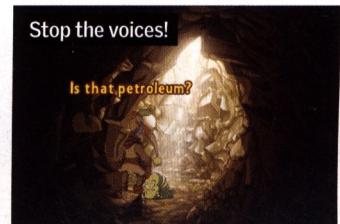
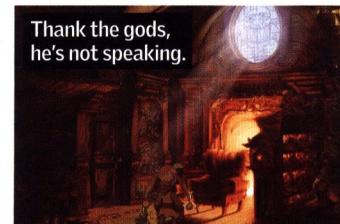
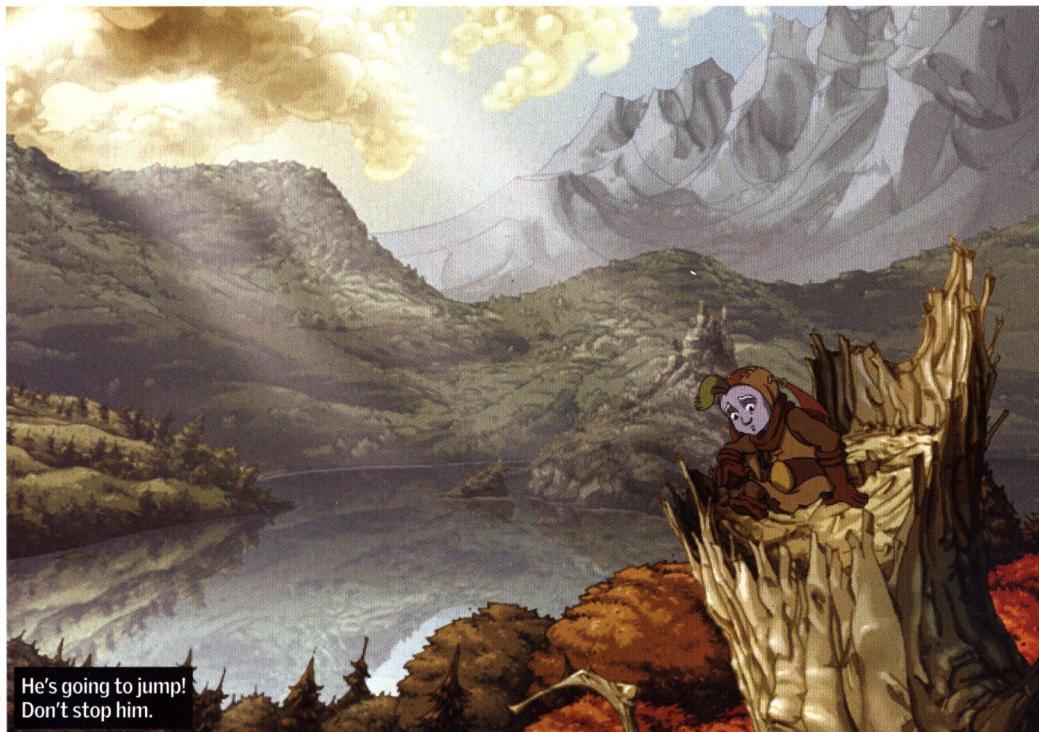
TRINE 72%

PCZONE

GRAPHICS Stylish monochrome
SOUND Minimal but effective
MULTIPLAYER Leaderboards

- ✓ Simple premise...
- ✓ ...fully explored
- ✓ Moments of true inspiration
- ✓ Perfectly priced
- ✗ Enough with the bums

84
Top trump



THE WHISPERED WORLD

You'll have to speak up, *David Brown* can't hear you...

DEVELOPER

Daedalic Entertainment

PUBLISHER Koch Media

WEBSITE the-whispered-world.com

ETA Out now

PRICE £19.99

THE CHARACTER YOU play in *The Whispered World* is called Sadwick, a young clown in a travelling circus. His name is apt, because he's constantly glum and morose, possibly in an attempt to personify the mumbly teen stereotype we all loathe so well. Curiously, he talks an awful lot as well, considering he's meant to be sullen and broody.

In fact, everyone in Daedalic's point-and-click adventure talk a lot. A hell of a lot. Far too much, in fact. The worst thing about this is that almost every single one has a repellent, odious voice, none more so than Sadwick himself. Being as he's the fellow you'll be listening to throughout the game, it's not long before you're literally wincing every time you hear him describe a bit of wood or a stone or something. Nothing can prepare you for the horrors that await you if you choose not to mute the voice audio.

Sadwick's painfully vocalised quest is to save the world, the twist being that he's the one that's apparently destined to destroy it.

On his journey, he'll be helped by his pet caterpillar Spot, a thankfully mute sidekick, who gains different abilities as the adventure progresses, all of which can be used to solve puzzles.

The world Sadwick and Spot inhabit is gorgeous and is easily the best thing about the game. The backgrounds are beautiful and the cutscenes are exquisite, but there's a slight let down when it comes to the actual animation, which is flat and rather disappointing.

the character's voices becomes the only way to have fun.

The underlying adventure beneath this terrible audio work is solid and worthwhile, with huge ticks in the win column for the graphics. Developers should note of what can be achieved in this area, but lessons should be learned about the importance of making your lead character actually enjoyable to listen to, for that is *The Whispered World*'s ultimate, massive undoing. **PC**

AT A GLANCE...

Gloriously presented traditional adventure set in a fantasy world that needs saving from your own character's fate.

MINIMUM SYSTEM REQUIREMENTS:
2GHz processor, 1GB RAM, and a 256MB graphics card.

HOW IT STACKS

A VAMPYRE STORY **73%**

CEVILLE **65%**

THE WHISPERED WORLD **64%**



Few adventures make you wary of talking to people, but *The Whispered World* makes you fearful of chatter, to the point where muting

PCZONE

GRAPHICS Luscious.

SOUND Argh, make it stop!

MULTIPLAYER None

- ✓ Wonderful visuals
- ✓ Solid adventure base
- ✗ Dreadful voices
- ✗ Some obtuse puzzles
- ✗ Irritating main character

64
Sssh, not so loud

Any second now a giant anvil will stop him.



SPLIT/SECOND: VELOCITY

Adam Glick has lost his grip on reality TV...

DEVELOPER Black Rock

PUBLISHER Disney Interactive
Studios

WEBSITE [disney.co.uk/
split-second-velocity](http://disney.co.uk/split-second-velocity)

ETA Out now

PRICE £39.95
(Direct2Drive only)

THERE AREN'T MANY live televised events that wouldn't be improved with the addition of high explosives. Crufts, The Chelsea Flower Show and Prime Minister's Questions would all benefit from the addition of some Semtex.

Reality television is an even better fit. A well-timed H-bomb on the next series of *I'm A Celebrity...* would vastly improve the show, with nuclear fire fulfilling Ant and Dec's dream of being physically fused together, while a selection of Z-List celebs attempt to chew kangaroo testicles as their teeth fall out from radiation sickness.

Disney seems to agree, and so *Split/Second* takes *Burnout*-style glossy racing, adds a reality TV-inspired format, and several kilotons of fireworks. Driving talent is still important, but if you're lagging behind, you have the option of demolishing a building so that it drops on your opponents.

As gimmicks go, it's a spectacular one. The vast majority of the Power

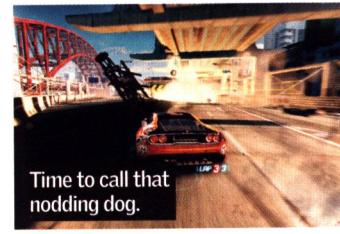
Plays, as they are called, are bespoke bits of scripting and simply seeing the next, more ludicrous set-piece is plenty of motivation for progressing to the next episode in *Split/Second*'s campaign. Also, no matter what anyone says, dropping an airport control tower on your friends is far more satisfying than hitting them with a rocket or a red shell to slow them down a bit.

Better yet, the larger Super Power Plays not only squish other racers, but also often profoundly modify the route of

the circuit, which makes revisiting locations during the season less onerous.

There are also a selection of game types which are introduced as you progress, which keep things interesting as well. The most exciting is the Dominator mode, in which you race against the clock through a series of scripted Power Plays. It's like attempting to escape the inside of Michael Bay's mind as it collapses around you – utterly unhinged. Also amusing is the Survival mode, in which you're tasked with

"It's like attempting to escape the inside of Michael Bay's mind"



AT A GLANCE...

Takes *Need For Speed* and adds a load of stuff from *Mario Kart*, without the irritating noises.

MINIMUM SYSTEM REQUIREMENTS:

2.6GHz processor (3GHz Vista/7),
2GB RAM (2.5GB Vista/7) and
a 256MB graphics card with Shader
Model 3.0 support.

HOW IT STACKS

COLIN MCRAE:
DIRT 2 90%

BURNOUT
PARADISE 89%

SPLIT/SECOND:
VELOCITY 79%



That must be the 'Shoe Bomber' Power Play.



Expect tunnels to collapse.



Taking a short cut.

overtaking a series of juggernauts that are shedding exploding barrels across the track. It becomes particularly chaotic in the sudden death mode, where the merest whiff of contact with a barrel turns your car inside out.

The thing is these extra modes are necessary because while *Split/Second* is undoubtedly spectacular and pretty, there's not a great deal of depth to be had from the Power Play mechanic. There's no reason to conserve energy for the Super Power Plays unless you're

curious to see what they look like, as a standard Power Play will usually do just as good a job of eliminating a pack of racers. The route changers that aren't linked to a Super Power Play are an even bigger waste of energy, and only make sense if you are desperate to see the other section of circuit.

RACING BOOMS

Even more troubling is the fact that there's very little timing to be mastered because the icon only appears when an

AUTOMATIC DRIVE You won't find this in the shops

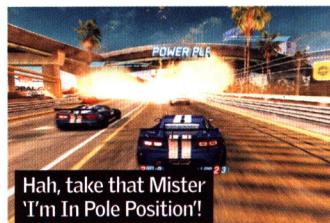
In a bizarre move, you won't find *Split/Second* on shelves of your local computer game shop. While it's a boxed version on store shelves almost everywhere else in the world, in the UK the only legal way to get the game is through Direct2Drive (direct2drive.co.uk). It's a baffling decision, not least because a glance at eBay or Yesasia.com reveals boxed copies that can be shipped over for a much cheaper price than the £40 D2D asks for.

If this is some kind of swing at piracy it's unlikely to work, and it's a remarkably expensive game to be released as a download-only title, exclusive to one supplier. Particularly if that provider isn't Steam.

Has Disney gone absolutely insane? Only time will tell, but this seems like the quickest way to utterly bury this enjoyable PC racer.



Hey, that car cloned itself!



Hah, take that Mister 'I'm In Pole Position'!

opponent is in range of the Power Play. As a result, you'll find yourself earning power without thinking too hard about it and deploying the attacks as soon as the opportunity arises.

There isn't even an option to activate defensive Power Plays, so if you're in the lead you just have to weather the storm of the other racers' ordnance.

Given that the game is far less tactical than it appears, it's a good job that the core racing is satisfying. The vehicles, which range from sleek exotics, through to chunky muscle cars and hefty trucks, are almost all great fun to drive. The muscle cars in particular are perfect for filthy great power slides. What's more, this is one of the few modern racers that handles well on the keyboard; you could complete the game without ever reaching for an analogue controller.

Split/Second is a noisy, polished and suitably spectacular racer. While the Power Plays themselves are enormously pleasing to execute, as a mechanic it doesn't work as brilliantly as other weapon-based racers'. In spite of this,

the game gives you plenty to enjoy on a superficial level, and those moments where you narrowly avoid a tumbling building or helicopter attack are worth the price of admission alone. **PCZ**

PCZONE

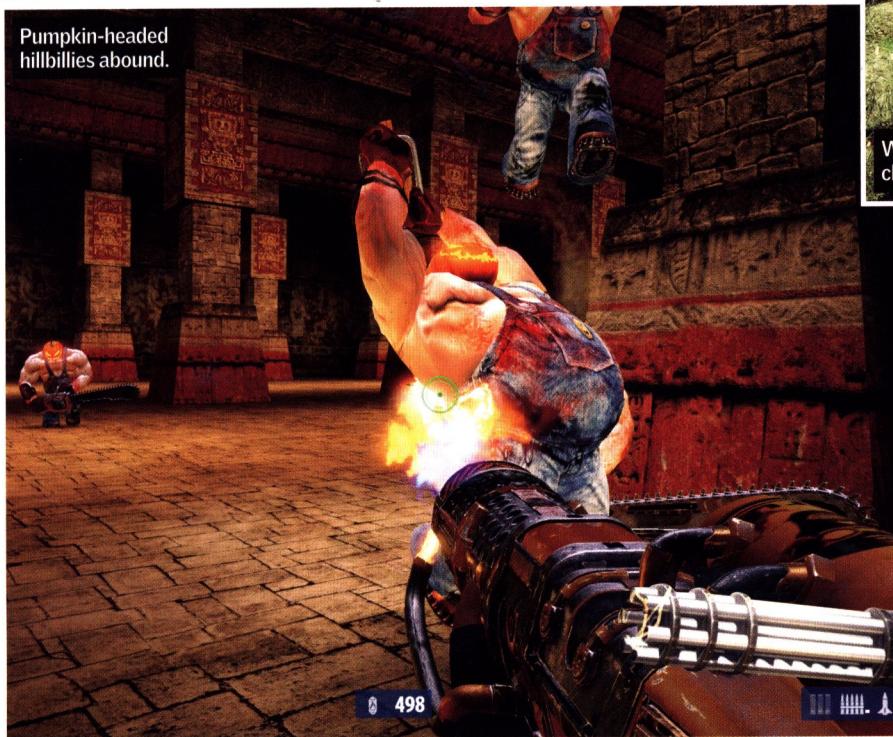
GRAPHICS Pleasing 'splodes
SOUND Throaty engines, meaty booms

MULTIPLAYER 8-player races and 2-player split screen

- ✓ Quick, slick racing
- ✓ Impressive explosions
- ✓ Entertaining mini-games
- ✗ Not much strategy involved
- ✗ Timing not necessary

79
Big, shiny, superficial

Pumpkin-headed hillbillies abound.



Why can't L4D2's chainsaw do that?

SERIOUS SAM HD: THE SECOND ENCOUNTER

David Brown gets kicked to death by harpies

DEVELOPER Croteam
PUBLISHER Devolver Digital
WEBSITE croteam.com
ETA Out now
PRICE £17.99

A REVISIT TO that most serious of Sam's sequel spectacles is a more worthwhile enterprise than it was initially, simply because effort has been put into making it more than just a re-skin job. This time, there's a host of new features to add a little spice to the frenzied monster slaughter staple.

First and foremost among the new additions is the plethora of multiplayer modes, with more co-op and Versus variants to consider. Up to 16 players can all play together in one campaign if they so choose, and there's also a Co-op Survival (as well as single-player) mode to plough through. For competitive types, new additions include My Burden (carry a point-giving object around for as long as possible) and Beast Hunt.

As for the main single-player element, it's not necessarily a given that you've come across the second game in the *Serious Sam* canon before. It's certainly not as widely loved, perhaps because by the time it came out, people were weary of the monster-wave FPS style it employed. Now though, with Steam achievements, cloud saving and leaderboards, plus the improved (though still ugly) visuals, this is a much

more complete package and is certainly more worthy of your readies than the first game's *HD* incarnation. The second game also eschews the classic Egyptian theme of the first, being set instead across three architectural zones – Aztec, Persian and medieval Europe.

THE NEW DUKE

A handful of new weapons and enemies have also been thrown into the mix, adding the fun of hacking foes to death with a chainsaw, roasting them with a flamethrower or picking them off with a sniper rifle. The action is the same as ever, though, even with the addition of the new weapons. Hordes of enemies rush you or lob flaming goo in your direction, with only nimble keyboard work and precision aiming to help in the fight against Mental's warriors.

At the end of the day, this package is a better proposition than the first remake. However good it is, and however much fun it is to indulge in such carnage, it'll still wear you down if you play for too long. Dabble and it's great,



AT A GLANCE...

A sparkly revision of the much-loved manic-shooter sequel, this time with added secret telephone kiosks.

MINIMUM SYSTEM REQUIREMENTS:
3GHz processor, 1GB RAM (2GB Vista/7), and a GeForce 7600 or ATI Radeon X1600 graphics card with Shader Model 3.0 support.

HOW IT STACKS

SERIOUS SAM HD: THE SECOND ENCOUNTER	73%
SERIOUS SAM HD: THE FIRST ENCOUNTER	67%
DREAMKILLER	31%

but it's about time Croteam brought something new to the table. While it's possible to enjoy *Second Encounter*, it makes you yearn for fresh material. **PCZ**

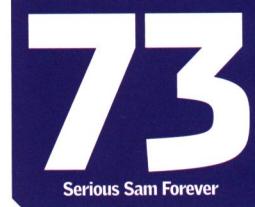
PCZONE

GRAPHICS Lovely engine, some sloppy textures

SOUND Grunts and shooting

MULTIPLAYER New modes, 16-player co-op

- ✓ Better package than *SS HD*
- ✓ Classic blaster gameplay
- ✓ Achievements etc
- ✗ Action can get repetitive
- ✗ Some ugly textures
- ✗ We want *Serious Sam 3!*



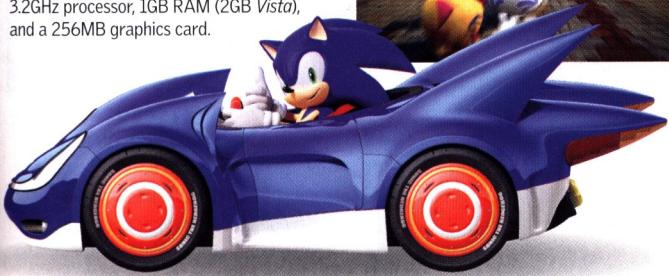


SONIC & SEGA ALL-STAR RACING

More of a sonic fart than a boom

DEVELOPER Sumo Digital
PUBLISHER SEGA
WEBSITE sega.com/sonicracing
ETA Out now
PRICE £19.99

MINIMUM SYSTEM REQUIREMENTS
 3.2GHz processor, 1GB RAM (2GB Vista),
 and a 256MB graphics card.



TWO QUESTIONS SPRING to mind when playing this *Mario Kart* clone. The first is, "What the hell?" which may be repeated many times with varying levels of amusement and utter bewilderment. The second is, "Did the commentator really just talk about monkey balls?" Of the two, the second question is the easiest to answer: Yes. Yes he did. And it was really rather unsettling.

Like a cosplayer showing up for a funeral wearing a Starfox costume and attempting to do a barrel roll with the coffin, *Sonic & Sega All-Stars Racing* feels a little out of place on the PC. That's not to say that it's a horrible console port. If anything, it's not even a port: it feels like a console emulation, right down to its insistence on referring to your PC as the "storage device" and refusing to acknowledge the existence of peripherals, such as a mouse.

When viewed and accepted as a console game that's got a little bit lost and wandered on to the wrong platform, things aren't so bad. There are a



multitude of levels, ranging from the world of Sonic to, oddly enough, *The House of the Dead*, and a wide variety of weird SEGA characters to pick from.

Gameplay is smooth, visuals are colourful and unashamedly jolly, and the game is full of catchy and nostalgic music. A few performance issues mar an otherwise fun little racer, and with unlockable tracks, music and characters, a series of challenge-based 'missions', the usual array of tournaments and single races, and the return of split-screen multiplayer to the PC, it's hard to be too harsh on this deranged but loveable little blue entity.

Nick Brakespear



SECRET OF THE MAGIC CRYSTALS

Horsing around

DEVELOPER Artwaregames Inc
PUBLISHER Artwaregames Inc
WEBSITE steampowered.com
ETA Out now
PRICE £6.49

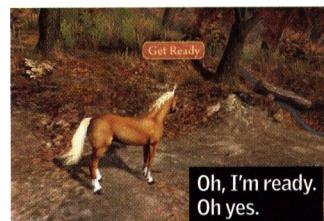
MINIMUM SYSTEM REQUIREMENTS
 1.4GHz processor, 512MB RAM, and a 64MB graphics card.

IN *SECRET OF The Magic Crystals* you are a farmer. A horse farmer. You farm horses. It's like agriculture, but with more meat and less veg. That could be a euphemism. I'm not really sure at this point. It's all gone a bit wrong for me.

You see, I have a unicorn called Lyndsey. I'm not sure why. Nor am I certain of Lyndsey's gender. To add to my confusion, Lyndsey's arrival leads me to the inescapable conclusion that my stables are capable of immaculate conception. I didn't buy Lyndsey, nor did I plant a horse seed and grow Lyndsey in my nonexistent horse fields. And yet, there was Lyndsey.

Lyndsey wasn't always a unicorn - the horn appeared about five minutes after Lyndsey's emergence from the stable, at which point Lyndsey suddenly mutated into a fully grown horse. Or unicorn. Whatever.

Now I've got to buy magic crystals for my unicorn, along with potions and horseshoes and all sorts of other objects



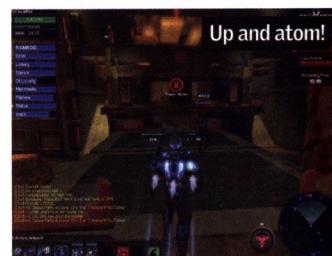
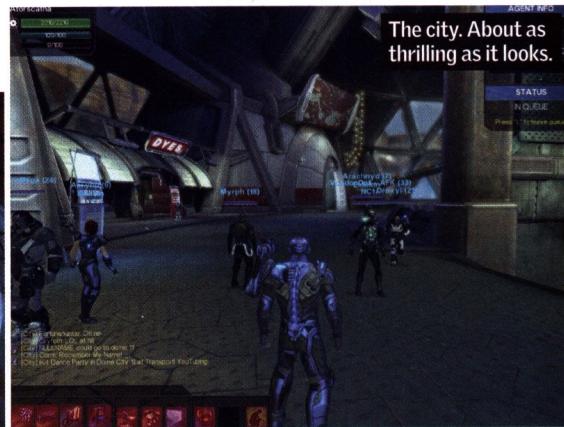
with which to train and decorate my equine friend.

Sometimes I send Lyndsey out to race or do chores around the village. When she's gone, a clock appears that you can look at. When she returns, I can watch her clop around the corral. I can also choose to breed her to get more horses - an event that's needlessly and explicitly rendered in horrific, thrusting, damp and cacophonic detail.

That last part isn't true. You never get to see the horses do it. You can, however, brush the horses.

Nick Brakespear





GLOBAL AGENDA

Nick Brakespear is a rocket man with an extra limb

DEVELOPER Hi-Rez Studios

PUBLISHER Hi-Rez Studios

WEBSITE globalagendagame.com

ETA Out now

PRICE £24.99

ONLINE
ONLY

AT A GLANCE...

Class-based multiplayer action with jetpacks, ultra-tight outfits and optional subscription content.

MINIMUM SYSTEM REQUIREMENTS:

2.4GHz processor, 2GB RAM (3GB RAM required for Vista/7), 256MB GeForce 8 series/Radeon HD3000 graphics card with Shader Model 3 or better. Broadband internet connection required.

HOW IT STACKS

TEAM FORTRESS 2 **93%**

TRIBES: VENGEANCE **87%**

GLOBAL AGENDA **65%**

JETPACKS ARE AWESOME.
Extraneous robotic appendages are also pretty awesome. If Boba Fett had an extraneous robotic appendage in addition to his jetpack, the world would probably collapse from sheer awesomeness.

A third-person sci-fi class-based multiplayer affair with persistent-world elements, RPG character development, extraneous robotic appendages and jetpacks, *Global Agenda* straddles the fence impressively for something clad in Lycra. Behaving like a confused MMO, buying a copy of the game grants you access to PvE co-operative missions and PvP skirmishes, while subscribing grants you access to 'Conquest', *Global Agenda*'s persistent conflict, in which virtual territories are captured through team-based combat.

Core gameplay follows the *Team Fortress 2* model, with a standard class



roster of medics, engineers, heavies and recons fighting over control points and the right to colour them red or blue.

Global Agenda has a pleasing enough concept, but one marred by the occasional unsightly bulge beneath its space-Spandex. Of these bulges, the most noticeable is the integration of its MMO and combat elements: they don't add up.

AIN'T NO TF2

The MMO-esque city area is little more than a glorified game lobby, while the otherwise solid combat suffers from balancing issues – namely, being unable to change class without levelling a new character leads to an overrun of one class or another in many matches. Also, newer players are pitted against enemies with wider equipment choices and better stats. With news that updates will include armour stats (currently, armour is purely aesthetic), the balancing can only get worse.

Meanwhile, the potential awesomeness of the jetpacks is diminished by level design. A distinct lack of ski-worthy slopes and an excess of angular environments leaves the game crawling at low altitude compared to the smooth, aerobatic displays of the *Tribes* franchise.

From a more aesthetic perspective, the use of the Unreal Engine 3 shows a lack of imagination, being generic sci-fi corridors, warehouses and conveniently placed platforms.

Global Agenda may make for a pleasing change from *Team Fortress 2* or *World of Warcraft*, but in the end our Lycra-clad chum is short in the leg, and finds itself hopping uncomfortably from one side to the other. **PCZ**

PCZONE

GRAPHICS Neon glow

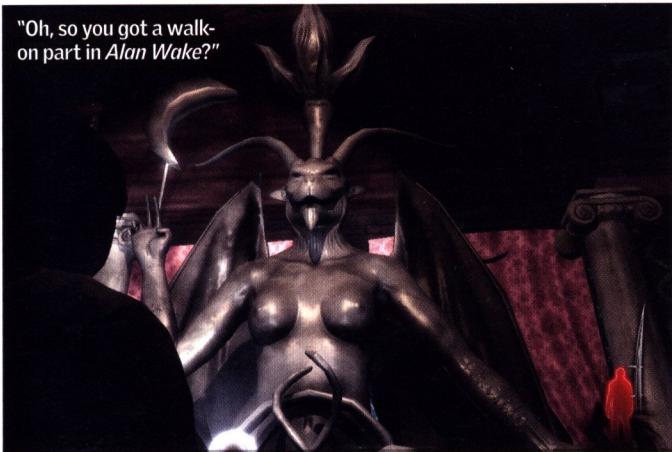
SOUND Forgettable

MULTIPLAYER Nothing but

- ✓ Jetpacks
- ✓ Customisable armour
- ✓ Subscription optional
- ✗ Confused design
- ✗ Uninspired levels
- ✗ Not as cool as *Tribes*

65

Globular whim



I'M NOT ALONE

Press 'Q' to go into the monster closet

DEVELOPER Pixel Revolution
PUBLISHER The Games Company
WEBSITE iamnotalone-game.com
ETA Out now
PRICE £24.99

MINIMUM SYSTEM REQUIREMENTS

2GHz single core CPU, 1GB RAM, and a GeForce 6600 or ATI Radeon X1600.

SO WHAT WOULD you do? You're a sarcastic gumshoe with the power to enter the spirit world. Well obviously you take jobs from creepy old ladies who live in *Resident Evil*-style mansions with bad local reputations and huge satanic statues in the lobby.

As you've probably guessed, *I'm Not Alone* presses all the familiar buttons for survival horror: tired plot, hysterical music, scuttling things at the periphery of your vision, and a poorly lit house with demonic inhabitants infuriated that you're there to sort them out. The problem is it brings nothing new to the table and fails to be entertaining, scary, or satisfying.

Combat basically involves whacking or shooting whatever is lumbering towards you until they fall down dead. Health is recovered through successful attacks in the monster closet – I mean Daemon World – that the game pre-warns you about in such a way that all the scares are nullified.



The puzzles are tedious fare, but there are some good touches – downed enemies are entertainingly dragged through the floor by icky tentacles. The problem is, the terrible frame rate and the lumbering engine makes combat a chore. Problems are compounded by an archaic and satanic save system.

The most depressing thing apart from the hackneyed plot, lumbering puzzles and chugging whack-attack combat is the price. Such a B-movie style game should have straight-to-video prices, but asking £25 will have you screaming in my sleep ever since.

James Holloway



PCZONE
45
Lumbering and zombified



SBK X SUPERBIKE WORLD CHAMPIONSHIP

'Road Rash' or just gash?

DEVELOPER Milestone
PUBLISHER Black Bean Games
WEBSITE www.sbkthegame.com
ETA Out now
PRICE £24.99

MINIMUM SYSTEM REQUIREMENTS

We suspect some kind of PC.

IHAVE ALWAYS considered superbikes the pinnacle of 'grr' manliness. Just you, some leather and a Freudian metaphor between your legs, and all for the insanity of riding at mad speeds just one mistake from total carnage. So it's strange that *SBK X* seems so anodyne.

The game starts promising enough, and mirrors *SBK 09*'s range of modes. Arcade allows you to hop on and ride almost unhindered on a full range of officially licensed bikes and tracks and the console fun continues with the boost key, which drains the screen of colour as the speed ramps up. The solid scalable simulation mode is the key draw here, as you can tailor the propensity for your rider to fall off, along with braking and turning abilities to your own skill level.

As with superbike's less manly cousin, F1, you're likely to witness some sickening crashes to see if riders' internal organs remain in their rightful place. Sadly *SBK X* makes crashes only a momentary distraction and you're



back on the undamaged bike within seconds. Luckily the in-built freeze cam allows you to gloat over your falls, but there's nothing to worry Codemasters crash-porn fare *GRID* and *Dirt*.

Milestone have certainly taken a leaf from the Codies playbook and *SBK X* features a similar lobby system, career mode and dude rock that *Dirt 2* made us suffer. It's just a shame that sober reverence for the licence has resulted in a game that feels rock solid but lacks thrills. Much like the square guy from the office turning up on a 1200.

James Holloway



PCZONE
73
Breakneck yet dull

Discussing Kant with a baby in a trunk.



SAM & MAX SEASON 3 EPISODE 2: THE TOMB OF SAMMUN-MAK

David Brown indulges in a bit of corpse disturbing

DEVELOPER Telltale Games
PUBLISHER Telltale Games
WEBSITE telltalegames.com/
samandmax
ETA Out now
PRICE £24.99
(five-episode season)

AFTER THE SUPERB first episode, the follow-up was always going to struggle to match it for quality. The first episode ended with a gruesome discovery in the basement of our heroes' building, which leads the plot of the second to descend into a *Day of the Tentacle*-style time-bending farce.

The discovery of four reels of film reveals the story of the freelance detectives' grandfathers, Sameth and Maximus, whose own adventure you get to control. Each reel can be played at any time, except the fourth one – the finale – which is saved until each of the other three have concluded.

The first reel sees the twosome attempting to win a competition for a trip to the titular Tomb and a search for an infamous treasure. The second is set in the Tomb itself and the third on the train back home.

Puzzles are primarily related to flipping between the reels and using information discovered in one to solve problems in another. This can mean that clues from the future impact on puzzles

and events in the past. But don't worry: this is *Sam & Max* – things aren't meant to make sense.

Things are a bit more challenging this time round because of the whole time travel aspect, but the chopping and changing of time lines can lead to things feeling a little disjointed at times, and while the re-introduction of old characters from Season 2 (Santa Claus, the elves, and the vampire Jurgen) is welcome, they don't bring as many laughs as were in the previous episode.

TOP CLASS

The removal of the future vision psychic power, replaced with two very amusing alternatives – the Can O' Nuts and the Ventriloquist's Dummy – makes puzzle-solving less simplistic, leading you to keep thinking, "Could this problem be solved by squishing down into a very small tin can?" All adventure games could do with that question being asked.

The Tomb of Sammun-Mak is definitely one of Telltale's best efforts and proves that this season's first episode wasn't a fluke. As irreverent

AT A GLANCE...

The freelance police find out how their strikingly similar grandparents met their end in this second episode of bizarre adventuring fun.

MINIMUM SYSTEM REQUIREMENTS:
2GHz processor, 1GB RAM, and a 128MB graphics card.

HOW IT STACKS

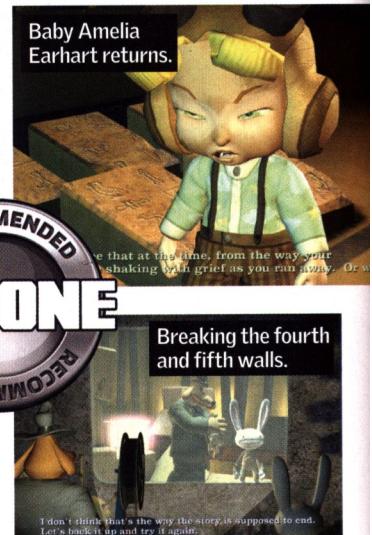
SAM & MAX 3.01 88%

SAM & MAX 3.02 85%

TALES OF MONKEY ISLAND 1.01 76%



Baby Amelia Earhart returns.



RECOMMENDED
PCZONE



and downright daft as ever, with baby aviators, the use of mole hexes to solve puzzles, finding a cow to milk on a busy train and all sorts of other bizarre set pieces all contributing to just another day at the (century old) office. And milking cows is all you can ask for in an adventure game, really. **PCZ**

PCZONE

GRAPHICS Nice moustaches
SOUND As good as ever
MULTIPLAYER One-player co-op

- ✓ Still funny
- ✓ More challenging
- ✓ Interesting psychic abilities
- ✗ Jurgen

85
Reel good times



XBOX 360™
THE OFFICIAL XBOX MAGAZINE

www.oxm.co.uk



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PLUS Halo: Reach • Hands-on with Gears of War 3
Portal 2 • Project Natal's launch games revealed

ISSUE 62 ON SALE 8 JULY

Budget

Jon 'Log' Blyth survives by eating the moths in his wallet

UNREAL TOURNAMENT 2004

PUBLISHER Mastertronic WEBSITE unrealtournament2003.com PRICE £4.99

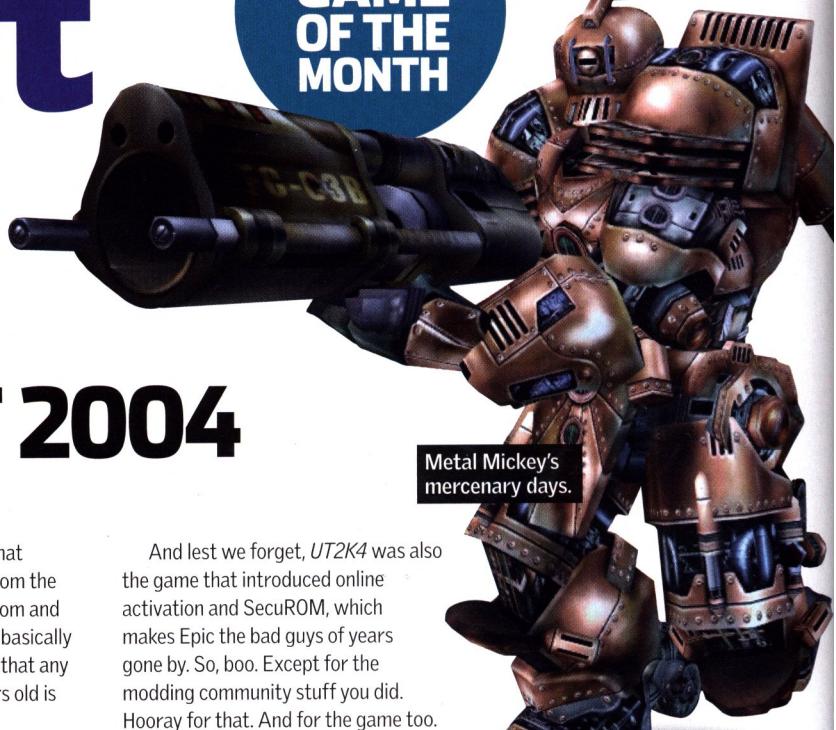
HARD TO BELIEVE this hasn't already been in the Budget section – all the others have been – but even though *UT2K4* has been available on Steam for £9 for a while now, it's just been stamped down to £5. Of course, it's going to look dated, but the only thing that matters when judging a *UT* game is whether the action is smooth and frantic, and *UT2K4* has that in spades.

For the game that gave us the Onslaught mode, introduced vehicles onto the battlefield, and nurtured its modding community with a generous toolset and the Make Something Unreal competition, five quid is a pittance. It's two quid cheaper than the Red

Orchestra mod, which won that competition and ascended from the development pot of moddb.com and onto retail shelves. *UT2K4* is basically a defining PC game, and one that any gamer who's over seven years old is likely to have.

The problem is, of course, that anyone left playing *UT2K4* is going to be hardcore about it, so online matches will see you getting a fair share of your arse delivered immediately back to you. But still, *UT* is all about dying quickly and getting back into the action. You're bound to land a lucky kill before the round's up, so give it a whirl.

BUDGET GAME OF THE MONTH



Metal Mickey's mercenary days.

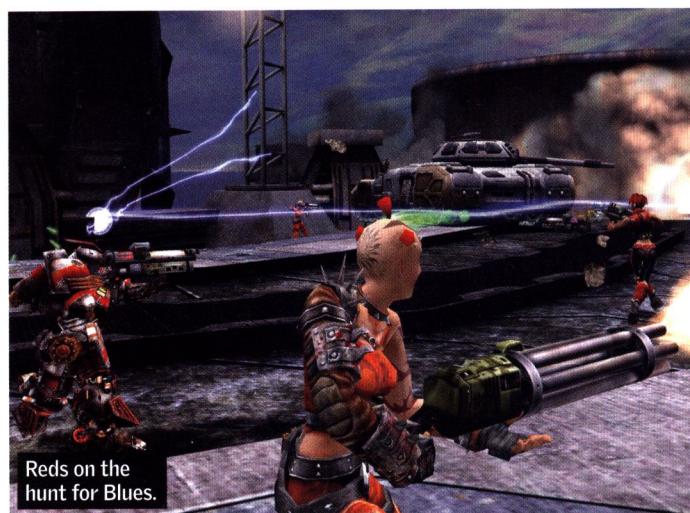
And lest we forget, *UT2K4* was also the game that introduced online activation and SecuROM, which makes Epic the bad guys of years gone by. So, boo. Except for the modding community stuff you did. Hooray for that. And for the game too.



Er... hang on.



Blame steroids.



Reds on the hunt for Blues.



That pilot's from Warhammer 40k!

**THIS MONTH
PCZONE
SAVED MONEY BY...**



David fingered slots in public payphones.
EARNING 20p



Stephen haggled a *Big Issue* vendor down to £1.50.
SAVING 20p



Log borrowed 20p he didn't intend to return, saying they'd be cheap to ask for it.
SAVING 20p

PCZONE
90
Best budget boomstickery

ENCLAVE

PUBLISHER Good Old Games WEBSITE gog.com PRICE \$6 (£4.50)

BACK IN 2003, *Enclave*'s epic underworld conflict looked amazing and sounded just as great. Testing the systems of the era to their limits, it discouraged you from addressing its shortcomings by waving its sexy textures in your face and making rude sound effects in your ear.



Sad, then, that this third-person fantasy slasher lacked in the combat department. The blend of melee, ranged and magical combat (and that phrase wasn't been used as often in 2003) suffered from poor collision detection, which made the unforgiving save system seem doubly unfair. Add that to



PCZONE TOP 5 BUDGET GAMES



MEDIEVAL II: TOTAL WAR

£10, White Label

The historical RTS game that set the standard for others to follow. Buy it, if only to try out the mods.



THE ELDER SCROLLS IV: OBLIVION GOTY

£14.99, Steam

The sequel to *Morrowind* features the massive open-world gameplay expected from *Elder Scrolls* games.



COMPANY OF HEROES

£9.99, Steam

A challenging yet fun, WWII RTS that sees you playing Axis and Allies in the days after D-Day.



PSYCHONAUTS

£10, Steam

You won't have more fun than this psychological platformer unless *Brütal Legend* appears on the PC.



MASS EFFECT

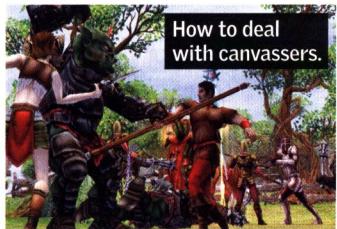
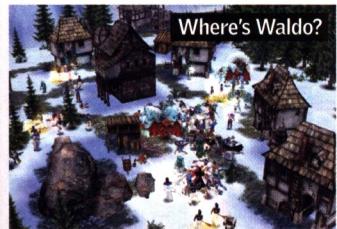
£12.99, Steam

The definitive space opera RPG/shooter. A must-play, especially before you start *Mass Effect 2*.

SPELLFORCE UNIVERSE

PUBLISHER Dreamcatcher Interactive WEBSITE spellforce.jowood.com PRICE \$6 (£3.50)

WHEN YOU'RE TRYING to think of something original, the easiest thing is just to mix two things that haven't been combined before, and call it something like Crasberry. *SpellForce* is the combination of role-playing and real-time strategy games, and it's a real shame that "role-time strategy" never kicked off as a genre.



The hero development allows you to distribute your points into magic, combat, or take a balanced approach, while exploring wide worlds and sizable cities. The online skirmish modes let you test the symmetry of the three factions against a mate. *SpellForce* games do suffer from that European fantasy scourge – humourless pomp – but if

everything was witty and knowing, we'd have no-one to look down on.

Spellforce Universe features the shaky first game and the superior sequel, *Shadow Wars*. Although the second game can be repetitive, the basic formula survives because it's a hugely enjoyable loop to be stuck in. With all the usual caveats about script and acting in place, the earnest storytelling is frequently enjoyable. Although the second game can slip into repetition, the elegant and well-executed genre combo can happily be replayed. After all, it's a hugely enjoyable loop to be stuck in.

PCZONE
81

AND THE REST...

Three dirt-cheap golden nuggets you should definitely own



CHAMPIONSHIP MANAGER 2008

£9.99, mastertronic.com
This poor vintage from the franchise has no appeal.

59



AGATHA CHRISTIE MYSTERIES

£9.99, mastertronic.com
A 3-in-1 special release of three really mediocre games.

47



HITMAN: BLOOD MONEY

£4.99, mastertronic.com
The 2008 £10 re-release got 80, so this re-re-release gets a bonus point for cheapies.

81

Buyer's Guide

Don't stop buying them until they're bought

PCZ TOP 5

FAVOURITE CHOC BARS
OF PC GAMING HEROES



- 1 GALAXY**
Commander Shepard, *Mass Effect*
- 2 LION BAR**
Colonel Ralgha nar Hhallas, *Wing Commander II*
- 3 MARS BAR**
Space marine, *Doom 3*
- 4 WALNUT WHIP**
Indiana Jones, *Fate of Atlantis*
- 5 CHOMP**
Pac-Man, *Pac-Man*

FPS



HALF-LIFE 2 + EPISODES

PCZ Issues: 148 (97%), 170 (91%), 187 (82%)
Excelling in terms of action, storyline, emotion and ingenious set pieces, the continuing adventures of Gordon Freeman have yet to be equalled. Yes, a moderate amount of the action has faded through repetition by the time the episodes kick in, but with its Combine-defying freedom fighting, this is still the most finely crafted shooter experience ever released on PC. Gordon's alive, and long may he remain so.



LEFT 4 DEAD

PCZ Issue: 202 – 93%
The only thing we like more than killing zombies is killing zombies as a team. And that's what *L4D* provides: a chance to scream with your buddies as you kill endless amounts of mindless and murderous plague victims.



TEAM FORTRESS 2

PCZ Issue: 187 – 93%
Beautifully balanced and engaging, Valve's update of the classic mod is a triumph, bringing together the best of online shooters and topping it all off with superb animation that rivals the best Pixar's films.



LEFT 4 DEAD 2

PCZ Issue: 214 – 94%
Basically, this is *Left 4 Dead* in the Deep South. Except this one has new modes, new Infected, new campaigns, as well as machetes and chainsaws for some serious slice and dicing. Better than the original.



FAR CRY 2

PCZ Issue 201 – 90%
A triumph of non-linear gameplay, *Far Cry 2* offers an astounding chunk of Africa in which to play with guns, flames and explosions. The residents are too tenacious, but in a world this well-realised, you won't care.



CALL OF DUTY: MODERN WARFARE 2

PCZ Issue: 215 – 94%
Take all of the greatest action movies of all time, stick them together, and add some semi-manufactured controversies, and you have a massive hit. Still, it's an absolutely great shooter.



BIOSHOCK

PCZ Issue: 185 – 96%
Despite the recent sequel having better gameplay, *BioShock* is still the superior game. Enter a destroyed Utopia under the sea, terrifying characters and emergent combat make this an unmissable experience.

STRATEGY



EMPIRE: TOTAL WAR

PCZ Issue: 205 – 94%
Vast yet manageable, accessible yet hardcore. All four words and more describe the best *Total War* game money can currently buy. With the addition of dramatic sea battles and an extended global campaign map, there's simply nothing else with the same grand scope that remains as easy to get into. We feel that the only game that will topple this game from its perch as the best strategy game around will be the next game in the *Total War* series. It really is that good.



COMPANY OF HEROES

PCZ Issue: 173 – 93%
With this game Relic took the best bits from RTS games and left out the crap, creating a game that's accessible, taxing and exciting. And its expansions *Opposing Fronts* and *Tales of Valor* keep the action coming.



WORLD IN CONFLICT

PCZ Issue: 186 – 92%
A stunning RTS set during the Cold War, offering innovative online play, a solid single-player campaign that combines great gameplay and a good story, jaw-dropping graphics and the best nuclear blast you've seen.



CIVILIZATION IV

PCZ Issue: 162 – 92%
A *Buyer's Guide* without a Civ game would be a sorry place, and the latest version is the greatest yet. Now with added warmongering and diplomacy in the expansion packs *Warlords* and *Beyond the Sword*.



SINS OF A SOLAR EMPIRE

PCZ Issue 193 – 91%
This startling beauty of an RTS seemed to come from nowhere, and quickly converted us from indifferent idiots into grateful idiots by surprising us with accessible complexity.



MEDIEVAL II: TOTAL WAR

PCZ Issue: 175 – 91%
A blend of maniacal plotting on the strategic map and cheering with delight as your warriors collide spectacularly with your opponents' armies. Middle Ages war fun.



SUPREME COMMANDER

PCZ Issue: 179 – 88%
Huge battles of thousands of air, sea and land units? Giant stomp robots and a superb tactical map? One of the most original RTS titles around? Check, check and check.

ACTION/ADVENTURE



GRAND THEFT AUTO IV

PCZ Issue: 203 – 91%
We PC users have had to wait a while (OK – we had to wait a bloody age) before we could return to Liberty City with Niko Bellic, but the delay has been worth it. This version of *GTA 4* adds graphics that are a cut above those seen on the consoles, expanded multiplayer modes, and an exclusive video editor, to Liberty City's free-roaming world and the sure-to-be-classic storyline of Bellic's American dream becoming an American nightmare.



MAX PAYNE 2: THE FALL OF MAX PAYNE

PCZ Issue: 136 – 93%
Payne is getting old, but it shows how to bullet-time right. Noirish tone, a glowering voice-over and remarkable gun action mean that this is still a force to contend with.



ASSASSIN'S CREED 2

PCZ Issue: 220 – 90%
Travel around Venice and Italy, meet Da Vinci and make friends with some prostitutes, run along walls and kill lots of people. It's *Assassin's Creed*, but with all of the kinks smoothed out, and plenty of depth added.



FAHRENHEIT

PCZ Issue: 159 – 90%
Murder most foul, and you're the killer. *Fahrenheit* boasts a twisting, turning, brilliantly told story, featuring multiple character control, split-screen tension, branching scenes and several endings.



PSYCHONAUTS

PCZ Issue: 156 – 90%
Clever, witty, impeccably detailed and off its rocker – *Psychonauts* is proof that the anarchic edge of LucasArts hasn't completely left us. A slightly flawed game in some respects, but still a dazzling feat.



BEYOND GOOD & EVIL

PCZ Issue: 138 – 89%
We heap praise on this game on a monthly basis, but it's for a reason. Michel Ancel's superb journey through the strange land of Hillys is nothing short of storytelling magic. It's cheap now, so go out and buy it.



BATMAN: ARKHAM ASYLUM

PCZ Issue 213 : 89%
Proof that licensed superhero games don't have to suck. *Arkham Asylum's* mix of action, RPG and stealth-em-up play makes it a near classic. The best *Batman* game we've ever seen.

PCZ TOP 5

PC GAMES TURNED INTO
FILMS BY DR UWE BOLL

1 ALONE IN THE DARK

Became 2005's *Alone in the Dark* and then *Alone in the Dark II*.

2 DUNGEON SIEGE

Turned into *In the Name of the King: A Dungeon Siege Tale*.

3 1968: TUNNEL RATS

Was also *Tunnel Rats*.

4 FAR CRY

Made into *Far Cry*.

5 POSTAL

Was adapted into 2007's *Postal*.

PCZ TOP 5

WORST-EVER MOVIE
ADAPTATIONS OF GAMES

1 ALONE IN THE DARK (2005)

Director: Uwe Boll

2 IN THE NAME OF THE KING:

A DUNGEON SIEGE TALE

Director: Uwe Boll

3 TUNNEL RATS

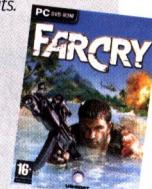
Director: Uwe Boll

4 FAR CRY

Director: Uwe Boll

5 POSTAL (2007)

Director: Uwe Boll



**CALL OF DUTY:
MODERN WARFARE 2**
PCZ Issue: 215 – 94%
Take all of the greatest action movies of all time, stick them together, and add some semi-manufactured controversies, and you have a massive hit. Still, it's an absolutely great shooter.



BIOSHOCK
PCZ Issue: 185 – 96%
Despite the recent sequel having better gameplay, *BioShock* is still the superior game. Enter a destroyed Utopia under the sea, terrifying characters and emergent combat make this an unmissable experience.

MMOs



WORLD OF WARCRAFT

PCZ Issue: 152 - 95%
Blizzard's recreation of Azeroth as a living virtual world doesn't disappoint. While its graphics are dated, it's beautiful to watch, absorbing to play and with more content than you can shake a magic stick at.



THE LORD OF THE RINGS ONLINE

PCZ Issue: 182 - 87%
A near-perfect recreation of Tolkien's tales, with solid combat and engaging plots, in a tasty MMO bundle. Meet Gandalf! Play as a hobbit or a spider? Middle-earth awaits...



WARHAMMER ONLINE: AGE OF RECKONING

PCZ Issue: 200 - 92%
Mythic slips Warhammer into their realm as realm template. Even the most reluctant PvPer will launch themselves into huge open warfare, and drop into temporary group quests.



GUILD WARS

PCZ Issue: 156 - 94%
How to make a gaming accessible to the masses. A lot of thought has been applied, and there are no subscription fees. Newbies can feel at home, thanks to a totally skills-based setup.



EVE ONLINE

PCZ Issue: 130 - 88%
Eve Online has been a long-held fantasy for old school gamers, and this space sim has come the closest yet to making it a reality. A slow pace belies the options on offer, from mining to trading to piracy.

SPORT



FOOTBALL MANAGER 2010

PCZ Issue: 214 - 88%
Every year sees another *Football Manager* appear to break up relationships across the country. But while *FM2010*'s updates mean it still holds the top spot, *Champ Man* is closing in.



PRO EVOLUTION SOCCER 2010

PCZ Issue: 214 - 85%
The football industry may ignore *PES*, but *PES* doesn't ignore PC users. This year's *PES* includes updates from the console release, something that *FM2010* can't claim.



NBA 2K10

PCZ Issue: 214 - 90%
Something of a niche product in the UK, this remains a fantastic sports game. Forcing you to use proper basketball tactics during matches that look like they're really on TV, *NBA 2K10* proves it's the top of its league.



FOOTBALL MANAGER LIVE

PCZ Issue: 205 - 85%
All the joy of *Football Manager* with added MMO fun. Build your own team from scratch and develop your manager's skills, to let you take on other managers around the world.



CHAMPIONSHIP MANAGER 2010

PCZ Issue: 214 - 80%
With a new 3D match engine, and new features like the set piece creator, *Champ Man 2010* has jumped up in quality. While it still can't match *FM2010*'s depth, it's far more accessible.

SIMULATION



X3: REUNION

PCZ Issue: 162 - 92%
Finally, a space sim to better *X2: The Threat*, and it just happens to be the sequel. This is possibly the best-looking game ever to appear on a PC. Oh, and it plays pretty well to boot. Why not get reunited with the X Universe?



IL-2 STURMOVIK: FORGOTTEN BATTLES

PCZ Issue: 128 - 92%
While flight sims are getting rarer and rarer, at least the quality remains high. None are more impressive than this ultra-classy WWII combat sim. Chocks away, comrade!



THE SIMS 3

PCZ Issue: 209 - 92%
The Sims 3 is like having your very own reality TV show in your PC, and just as addictive. Near complete freedom of gameplay lets you be a vicious diety, a benevolent dictator, or just a creepy voyeur.



MICROSOFT FLIGHT SIMULATOR X

PCZ Issue: 175 - 89%
The latest (and maybe final) in the *Flight Simulator* series is the biggest since Microsoft started using actual polygons. What's more, the visuals may just sear your eyeballs.



OPERATION FLASHPOINT: DRAGON RISING

PCZ Issue: 213 - 90%
Like its peer *ArmA II*, *OpFlash 2* aims to bring realistic warfare to your PC. But unlike its peer this game doesn't forget it's meant to be 'fun', not some kind of military training aid.

DRIVING/RACING



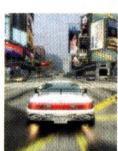
GTR

PCZ Issue: 173 - 92%
Pick up this scarily realistic driving sim and race the car of your dreams. It comes with an improved driving model, new game modes and many other improvements. Guaranteed to make you feel like the Stig.



COLIN MCRAE: DIRT 2

PCZ Issue: 214 - 90%
The new rally game bearing the name of the deceased driver is a stunner. A successful mix of an arcade racer and simulator, that has most sumptuous graphics of any racer around. This sequel is going to be tough to beat.



BURNOUT PARADISE: THE ULTIMATE BOX

PCZ Issue: 205 - 89%
This game has set the standard for online arcade racers. Packs more speed than a drug dealer and more fun than slapping a bag full of Jonathan Rosses and Russell Brand's.



RACE DRIVER: GRID

PCZ Issue: 195 - 88%
Codemasters moves the series from its historical simulation roots, strips off the TOCA and creates a movie-realistic game with plenty of play modes and global challenges. Kind of like *Burnout*, but with proper tracks.



NEED FOR SPEED: SHIFT

PCZ Issue: 213 - 84%
The *Need for Speed* series gets serious. Well, not too serious as the game is still weighed in the favour of fun over realism. But this is a polished release, and the best *NFS* around.

ODDBALL



SPORE

PCZ Issue: 199 - 95%
This is four charming mini-games and an excellent space strategy game, glued together with a bunch of creation kits. It's also a beautiful one-off that is so well-realised that you should experience it yourself.



WORLD OF GOO

PCZ Issue 201 - 90%
A stroke of indie genius, World of Goo is a puzzle in which you erect fantastic goo-based structures across a myriad of unique and intriguing levels. Novel at every turn, this indie title is simply irresistible.



PORTAL

PCZ Issue: 187 - 89%
Ingenious and absurdly funny, *Portal* is a four-hour slice of perfect puzzles and discovery. Hurling yourself through floors and walls sounds odd, but modern games are rarely more delightful.



GARRY'S MOD

PCZ Issue: 179 - 88%
The God-like *Garry's Mod* gives you the tools to create almost anything you can think of in the Source engine, from working robots to saucy ragdoll JPEGs. Fun and easy to use, try it out and see for yourself.



BAIRD

PCZ Issue: 209 - 90%
Braid is extremely pretentious, but extremely well made, with time-bending twists that'll provide a challenge to new and veteran platformers. It also has a secret editor for making your own levels.

LOG'S PICK



BATMAN: ARKHAM ASYLUM

PCZ Issue 213 - 89%
I'm saying *Arkham Asylum* because I didn't want to say *World of Goo*. I love *World of Goo*, and I want 2D boy to become ultra-billionaires riding around on diamond-eyed dragons, but I also feel I should acknowledge that it's 2010 now, and withdraw my *Goo*-gushing until they make a new game.

So, *Arkham Asylum*: the game I first played about 18 months ago, when a surprisingly complete preview copy fell into my hands. The game I played completely through, unable to write about half of it, because of the NDA that came with it. Still, it was a privileged feeling – it's not often you finish a game for a preview – and it actually felt slightly naughty, like I was getting more than I deserved.

But it was well-judged for Rocksteady. By the time I got to do my interviews and write the preview, I was already 100% sold on their treatment of the caped bastard, and was desperate to write the actual review.

Well, that never happened – I never ended up reviewing *Arkham Asylum* for anyone. So those hours spent in the house, desperately telling an uninterested housemate that I was Batman and he had to come and look, because I was being Batman on the telly, can remain a pure memory for me. Batman... I never had to give you a score. This love transcends percentages. Give us a cuddle.

STEVE'S PICK



GARRY'S MOD

PCZ Issue 179 - 88%
If you want to play *Garry's Mod* on some of the game's more interesting servers (the Goonie Goon Gun servers are where you'll find the most amazing contraptions, in my opinion) you'll have to download about 4GB worth of content. This includes basic building blocks (something missing from the cache of Source-engine models shipped with *Garry's Mod*) as well as things like gears (which work as they should), railings along which spheres can roll, bits of jet planes and other very specifically useful objects.

You'll also be downloading maps, one of which turns *Garry's Mod* into a space-combat arena, replete with planets you can fly between and explore, some with inhospitable atmospheres, others covered in ice, and all capable of being built on. See if you can construct a spacecraft that can not only deliver you safely to the planet surfaces, but also protects you from the horror-vacuum of space. Or, if you're rubbish at building, simply watch other players carefully and purposefully bolting their inventions together. It's a relaxing pursuit.

Guide (and a way of easily downloading that broad range of crap you'll need before you can play online) can be found at [gggbottlabs.org](http://www.ggbottlabs.org) – though if you can't be bothered with any of that, I implore you to just play about offline with the default gubbins. Even if it's all you can do to put Alyx in sexy poses.



Want to know what's coming out? Then turn to page 20 for the full run-down.

MAMA
FESTIVALS

& Rock CLASSIC

PRES

HIGH VOLTAGE



SATURDAY 24 JULY 2010

MAIN STAGE



FOREIGNER
GARY MOORE



THE UNION

Black Label
Society

HAMMER
STAGE

SAXON
CATHEDRAL • HAMMERFALL
ORANGE GOBLIN
BLACK SPIDERS • NEW DEVICE

SUNDAY 25 JULY 2010



FEATURING
JOE ELLIOTT
IAN HUNTER

JOE BONAMASSA
BACHMAN & TURNER
UFO • THE QUIREBOYS



HIGH ON FIRE

AUDREY HORNE • LETHARGY

PROG STAGE

TRANSATLANTIC



ASIA

DWEZIL ZAPPA

FOCUS

PENDRAGON • TOUCHSTONE

marillion

ARGENT

URIAH HEEP
(PERFORMING DEMONS & WIZARDS)

MAGNUM • STEVE HACKETT

MARTIN TURNER'S WISHBONE ASH
(PERFORMING ARGUS)

THE REASONING

LONDON VICTORIA PARK

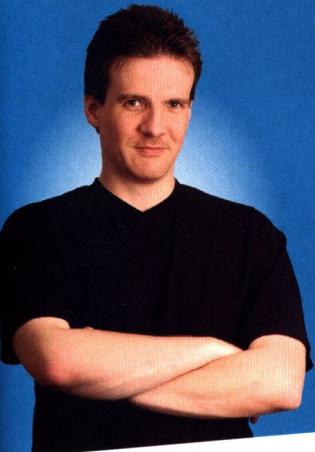
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PCZONE

Hardware

Better gaming through technology

BE TOLD

AT ANY GIVEN moment there are two or more sick or wounded PCs dotted about my home, my wife doing her best to move around them without throwing me a disapproving stare. They're there because I was crazy enough to fix them the last time their owners' lack of understanding caused them to grind to a halt, and the flow won't dry up any time soon.

There's no point blaming anyone for my predicament. You can't open a newspaper, a magazine or turn a TV on without someone trying to sell you a PC. Some are so cheap they're disposable, but many aren't. And while manufacturers and retailers are delighted to pluck £1,500 or more from pockets of eager punters, they seldom explain how new owners should care for their purchase.

Like making sure everything is backed things up. The overwhelming majority of problems I see are unavoidable, such as a meltdown resulting from a stuck fan, a dead hard drive or child with a cup of Ribena and a toy hammer. The resulting chaos is most easily sorted by drying out and/or replacing the failed components, and then simply restoring the last backup which nobody bloody has.

This is the last time I'm going to say it, because if you bring your PC round and your stuff isn't backed up I'm going to throw it in the road – keep backups!

Wanday

Phil Wand
Hardware editor

WARNING: THIS MONTH'S HARD WORDS

BY JON 'LOG' BLYTH

FOUR FLUSH

Super-crazy platforms suggest the recession is over

WE'VE RECENTLY SEEN the arrival of not one, but three insane motherboards aimed at highly maladjusted, e-peen-comparing types whose goal in life is to be first through the respawn room doors when the level changes.

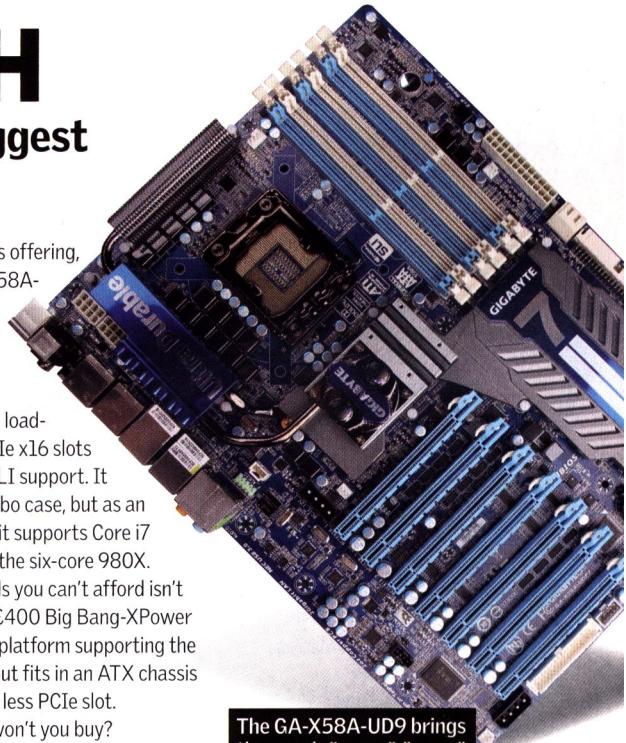
Following on from the X58 Classified platform it launched last year, EVGA have announced another seven PCIe slots, four-way SLI board known as the Classified Super Record 2. It provides support for the new six-core Xeons, rather than any of the Core i series of processors.

Like its X58 predecessor, the £425 SR-2 is what EVGA call "XL-ATX" sized: it measures roughly 4cm longer and 2cm wider than the standard ATX form factor and requires a specialist chassis.

GIGABYTE's offering, the £415 GA-X58A-UD9, appears to have popped from the same mould in that it offers the same load-out of seven PCIe x16 slots and four-way SLI support. It too needs a jumbo case, but as an X58 derivative it supports Core i7 CPUs including the six-core 980X.

If two boards you can't afford isn't enough, MSI's £400 Big Bang-XPower is another X58 platform supporting the latest i7 CPUs but fits in an ATX chassis courtesy of one less PCIe slot.

Which one won't you buy?
evga.com, giga-byte.co.uk, msicomputer.co.uk



The GA-X58A-UD9 brings the words "sense", "more" and "money" to mind.

FAST TRACT

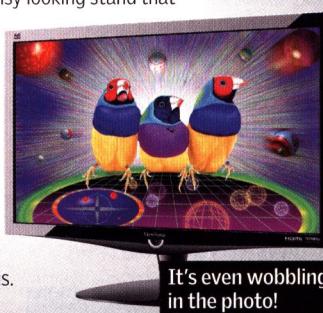
ViewSonic claim a world first

SOLD AS THE first 27in panel with a response time of just one millisecond, ViewSonic's new VX2739wm seems made for gaming.

On sale now for £299, despite a suggested retail price of £282, this 1920x1080 screen might just be passable value: it has DVI, D-sub and HDMI connections, four USB ports, and a flimsy looking stand that lacks height adjustment.

You also get integrated two-watt SRS Premium Sound speakers that ViewSonic claim will give owners a "cinematic audio experience", although this is doubtful.

We'll let you know the moment the Californian company goes back to making those premium-feel products for which it used to be famous.
viewsonic.co.uk



It's even wobbling in the photo!

NEWS ROUND-UP

ASUS HAS CONFIRMED that its Bang & Olufsen designed polished aluminium NX90JQ laptop will be available in July. The exquisite i7 portable has two large touchpads at the far edges of the keyboard (if someone can explain why this is necessary, please do), together with an 18.4in LED backlit screen, and integrated B&O speakers. Expect very little change from £2,000 and an increased likelihood of being mugged. uk.asus.com

ONCE AGAIN BT are promising us all the things we want to hear, no doubt only to disappoint us by either failing to deliver or changing their mind or both. This time they claim that they'll have incredibly fast fibre-optic cables providing broadband at speeds of up to 100Mbps reaching more than 60% of the nation by 2015. I'm waiting. bt.co.uk

CINEBENCH: A forgotten ride from '70s Alton Towers, in which visitors would remove their tops, sit down and look through a Viewmaster while a man dressed as a dog whipped their tummies with his tail. **CREATIVE ALCHEMY:** After failing to convert base metals into gold, alchemists avoided accusations of fraud by making less tangible claims. One was that an alchemist could turn base metals into "something nice happening in a few days." **M4A785TD-V EVOL:** What your mum said when she saw my rad BMX moves. **SISOFT SANDRA:** The madam of Amsterdam's premier brothel. At the peak of her popularity, she had 19 prostitutes working simultaneously in each room.

Dear Wandy

If it ain't broke, don't fix it. If it ain't working, don't panic...

PROBLEMS?

Mistook your wardrobe for the toilet again? Local shop stopped stocking your favourite blue-flavoured Pringles? Been playing *World of Warcraft* so long your partner's left you? Wandy can't help with those setbacks, but we can solve all your hardware hassles. Wandy knows all, and he's willing to help if you email him at: wandy@dearwandy.com, including details about your problem and system specs.

0 STIR FRIED BIOS

Q I bought my daughter a PC from a car boot sale. It has an ASUS P4SP-MX motherboard, Pentium 4, 256MB RAM, 420W power supply unit (PSU), a 500GB hard drive, and an Matrox AGP graphics card.

I wanted to see if I could add a new processor because the existing Pentium chip is very slow. I downloaded a new BIOS from the ASUS website and after flashing there was a checksum mismatch and then an error saying something had been corrupted followed by an automated recovery process.

After removing the power and rebooting, hoping that something as simple as a restart would cure it, the screen no longer works. It is, to all intents and purposes, a dead PC.

Did I miss a step here? Is it possible to flash the wrong BIOS? If so is there any way of undoing my mistake?

Kenneth Luck

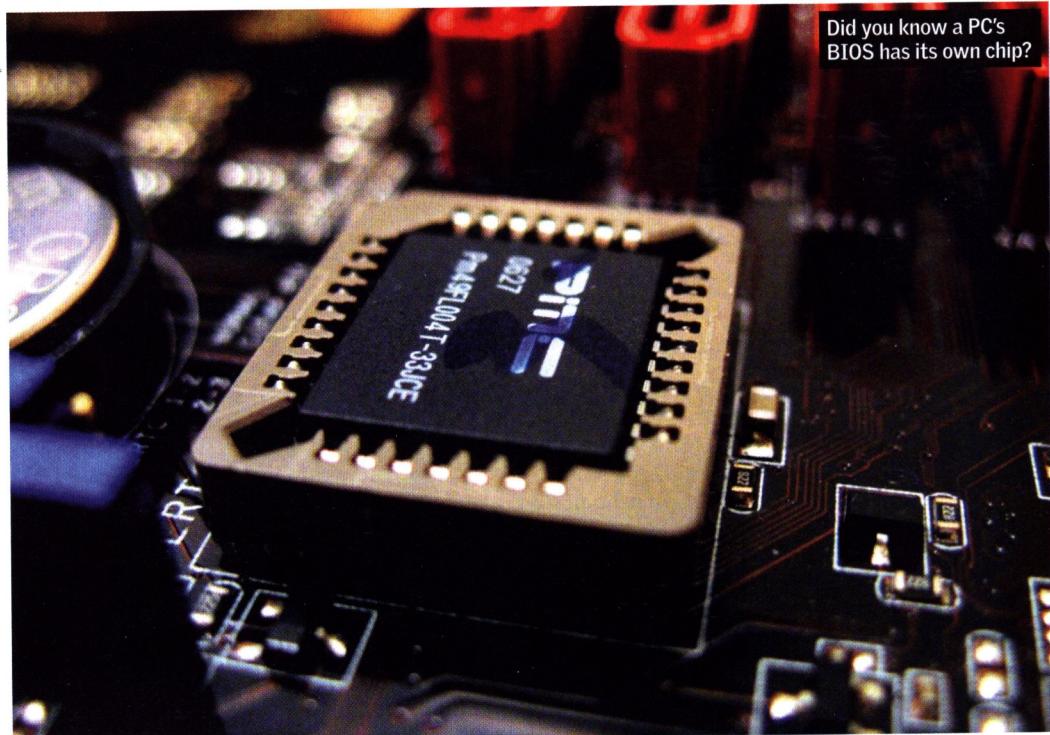
DRIVER WATCH

GRAPHICS

MANU	DESC	RELEASED
ATI	CATALYST 10.3	24 Mar 10
NVIDIA	Force Ware 197.41	9 Apr 10

SOUND

MANU	DESC	RELEASED
Creative	X-Fi Beta 2.18.0004	30 Jul 08
Creative	Creative Alchemy 1.20.04	01 Aug 08
Creative	Audigy Beta 2.18.0001	17 Jul 08



Did you know a PC's
BIOS has its own chip?

A From the specification of your machine, its previous owner was probably someone who wasn't averse to unscrewing the lid and making changes. The power supply and the hard drive are of an unnecessary capacity that doesn't fit with the rest of the configuration - had they been bought at the time the PC was new, they'd have cost as much as the entire system. I would therefore advise you look for loose connectors inside and have a good sniff to make sure you can't smell anything burnt out.

Also try removing the CMOS battery, waiting a few seconds and then sticking it back. You might try replacing the battery with another CR2032 while

"More than likely that you've managed to toast your BIOS"

You're at it. While some motherboards will refuse to boot with low battery voltage, I doubt that's the problem here. More than likely you've managed to toast your BIOS. I'm not convinced it was your fault, nor that you flashed the wrong file (very hard, but not impossible on old boards) because the ASUS CrashFree BIOS recovery utility is more likely to have made things worse. At least, that's been my experience of it.

My suggestion is to contact bios-repair.co.uk and get a replacement EEPROM chip posted to you for the princely sum of £12.49 plus postage.

Q **CONTINUING CRYYSIS**
To solve the stuttering *Crysis* problem you helped me with in issue 220, I spent £550 on my system. I bought an ASUS M4A785TD-V EVO, Phenom II X2 550

Black Edition, four 2GB OCZ DDR3 PC3-10666 RAM modules, a 1GB Radeon HD 5770 and Antec's TP650 PSU.

I now seem to have a problem with my RAM. It started when I tried to install *Windows 7* and I'd see a blue screen of death before the installation started and sometimes halfway through.

I found Windows would install with just one stick of RAM and after lots of faffing I ran *Windows Memory Diagnostic* on each stick and found that half came back with errors. I also tried *Memtest86*, but that crashed every single time and reported the wrong processor and RAM type so I just don't think it works with my configuration.

Initially I thought I could just use the two working sticks and return the others. But no, my system remains unstable even with two. It boots up and WMD doesn't report errors but it crashes when I run

wandy@dearwandy.com
dear wandy, pc zone, future publishing, @
2 balcombe st, london, nw1 6nw

"Making manual adjustments to RAM timings and to voltages is only ever going to create problems"

games and even at the desktop I get problems from Microsoft Security Essentials and even Windows Update.

Along the way I've updated my BIOS and I've tried to learn about RAM timings, because even after building PCs for over a decade I haven't got a clue what to do with them! I've set CL-9, tRCD-9, tRP-9 and TRAS-20 and I've upped the power to 1.7V.

Where do I go from here? Are there some settings I'm missing? Do I need to fiddle about with the Northbridge's configuration? I've posted on forums where I got a little bit of advice and emailed ASUS with no reply.

By the way, it runs fantastic with just one stick of RAM in – no problems at all and I can run *Crysis* at 1280x1024 with everything maxed out.

Stu

A My guess is that the tree up which you are currently barking is the wrong one. Had it been me, the moment I discovered I had faulty RAM – and it happens more often than you might think – I would have replaced it. If the replacement stick also threw errors, I'd then have had the board replaced because it's likely it has a duff slot (or you've inadvertently damaged one) as it is that your memory is broken.

As part of testing, I would make sure you examine all the slots on the board and in particular populate both blue and the black slots and then the two banks

alternately to see if that has an effect. I'd be inclined to stick with Memtest86 from memtest.org. It's a tradition for it to misidentify your hardware because it's so rarely updated. The latest 4.0 version was release after your 550 BE was launched, but still, I'm not surprised.

Should you need replacement RAM, don't worry about losing your matched pairs. A lot of folk think that matched pairs are only 'true' pairs if their serial numbers are consecutive. This is bollocks. Not only do manufacturers apply serial numbers at a late stage of manufacturing, by which time the chips will have been well and truly shuffled on their journey down the factory line, it would also mean that replacing one bad stick would mean having to replace the ones matched with it – and from a business standpoint that's just plain nuts.

On the subject of your BIOS tweaks, I'd put everything back to standard. If you're new to overclocking, making manual adjustments to RAM timings and to voltages is only ever going to create problems rather than solve them, and particularly when using chips that aren't on ASUS' qualified list for your board. What I'd do is download AMD OverDrive from game.amd.com and make small changes to the multiplier there, being sure to run a benchmark in between the tiniest changes.

After reaching the limit on standard voltage, again make small change of 50mv per tweak until your system freezes or the benchmark reports an error. Only then move on to the Northbridge settings.

Q SHAKE & CRAP
I've recently installed Windows 7 and can't get some of the new Aero desktop features such as snap, shake and peek to work. I'm not sure if I've inadvertently

ALL ABOUT...

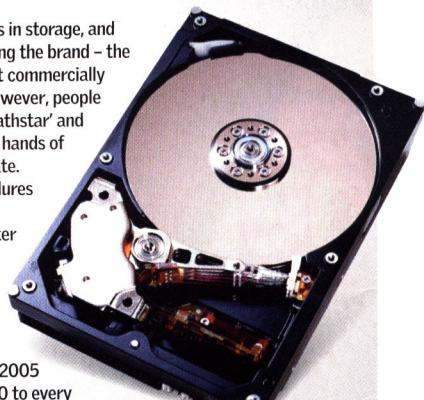
28 IBM DESKSTAR 75GXP

The IBM Deskstar 75GXP is the worst hard drive ever made. It was the subject of a class action lawsuit in 2001 which led to IBM selling its disk division to Hitachi the following year.

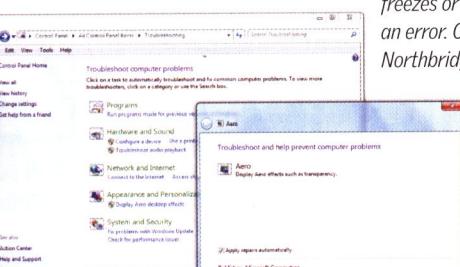
Deskstar is one of the oldest names in storage, and today Hitachi still produce HDDs bearing the brand – the Deskstar 7K2000 was the world's first commercially available 7,200rpm 2TB hard drive. However, people still jokingly refer to the line-up as 'Deathstar' and particularly those who suffered at the hands of the 75GXP's abnormally high failure rate.

At the time, IBM dismissed the failures on its 75GB devices as being "within normal ranges for desktop drives". After the lawsuit was filed, the company's division lost an astonishing \$500m in the lead up to being sold.

IBM was later found guilty of misleading customers about product reliability, the lawsuit being settled in 2005 and the company agreeing to pay \$100 to every user whose drive had failed. Sadly, because it was a US action, it's never been made clear how European drive owners would be compensated.



Seen one on eBay?
Best not to bid.



Fix features you don't need in Windows Troubleshooter.

switched them off somewhere but if so I can't find where to turn them back on again. Can you please help?

Andy Christopher

A Aero features are crap. Snap is actually a dock – it causes an application to hug a side of your desktop when moved off screen. A snap tool should make windows magnetic so you can arrange their borders tight against desktop edges or other windows.

Peek makes windows transparent, allowing you to see the desktop. But why would you need this? If you want to see the desktop, use Winkey+D.

As for shake, this is the mouse gesture equivalent of Winkey+D. Wiggle one application and all the others minimise – cute, but hardly revolutionary.

But I'm moaning rather than answering your question. Open the Troubleshooting control panel and click 'Display Aero Desktop Effects'. Click the

Advanced link and make sure Apply Repairs Automatically is checked. Start the wizard by pressing Next. That's it.

Q PC PHONE HOME

My home phone died and I'd like to replace it with something I can plug in to my PC. I want to share contacts, images and the like, same as with my mobile phone. I can't find a handset that does this. Are you aware of one?

Phil Kennedy-Clarke

A Many recent Siemens phones come with Gigaset QuickSync, an application that syncs a handset's contacts with those on XP, Vista and 7. My recommendation would be the Gigaset SL780, a GAP-compatible DECT device with Bluetooth and a mini-USB socket for updating of firmware, backgrounds, ringtones, and all the other stuff humanity has survived without for several hundred thousand years. **PEZ**

FORUMS:
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(Gavpowell) I'm refurbishing a series of P4 machines at the moment with the intention of flogging as cheap basic PCs. I was thinking about using Linux to keep costs down. I heard wonderful things about Ubuntu and I've seen Mint as a possible windows equivalent, but has anyone got any other suggestions? (Rich) Ubuntu is as easy as Linux gets. But it's not an easy thing to get along with. I tried it while debating what to do with my netbook and the first thing I did was try and play an AVI. Nope. Need a Codec. Which one? Didn't tell me. How can I look? Didn't tell me. It's really not friendly to use unless you're half decent with a PC. (spacein_vader) You'd be better off with Windows 2000 or XP.

MULTI-CORE CPUs

These CPUs have sets of individual processors (cores) on a single chip. Each core can work on separate tasks simultaneously. The multi-core CPU's clockspeed refers to each core's speed, not the combined total speed of each core.



The X2 635 offers hidden bonuses.

PCZONE
85 ATHLON II
X2 635

PCZONE
70 PHENOM II
X2 555 BE

AMD ATHLON II X4 635 & PHENOM II X2 555 BE

PRICE £99 (Athlon II)/£80 (Phenom II) MANUFACTURER AMD WEBSITE www.amd.com

THE ATHLON II X4 635 and Phenom II X2 555 seem to be mildly reworked versions of existing AMD chips: the Phenom playing the role of the quick dual-core chip with a big cache, while the Athlon is the archetypal cut-price quad core.

Like all Phenom II processors, the X2 555 is based on AMD's second-generation 45nm quad-core CPU architecture. These days AMD makes dual and triple-core chips by making

quad-cores disabling one or two cores. This means AMD doesn't have to tool up for multiple processor dies, and quad-cores with broken dies can be turned into viable dual or triple-core products. This also means users can unlock cores and turn a sub-£100 dual-core into a quad-core. Do it with an X2 555 and you'll have a Phenom II X4 955 for £40 less than the X4's asking price.

There are catches though: there are no guarantees chips will work after being unlocked, and their motherboard must support core unlocking. Our experience has shown you have a 50/50 chance of this working.

The Phenom II is a 3.2GHz CPU with 7MB of cache memory (unlock dormant cores and this raises to 8MB). As an AM3 chip it fits AMD's AM2, AM2+ and AM3 sockets and works with either DDR2 or DDR3 RAM. Its final feature of note is an

unlocked CPU multiplier: this gives it the ability to overclock without touching the processor bus, so your northbridge and RAM won't fail.

The Athlon II X4 635 is also based on AMD's latest 45nm quad-core processor architecture, but in a new die called Propus and running at 2.9GHz. The key difference to the Phenom II is the 1MB cache. The Athlon has to get data from system RAM more often which slows it down, although it keeps its cost down.

In multi-threading tests the quad-core Athlon runs nearly as fast as a Core i5. Where the Athlon's falls down is in gaming, with average frame rates in *World in Conflict* coming at 50fps, compared to a Core i5 750's 72fps. The minimum frame rate also drops (14fps compared to the i5's 25fps).

BENCHMARKS

	ATHLON II	PHENOM II
CINEBENCH *	81	131
WORLD IN CONFLICT *	50	52
SISOFAT SANDRA *	12	11

* Seconds (fewer is better) * Frames per second (more is better)

* Gigabytes per second (more is better)

As for the Phenom, it's miles off the pace of the Athlon II and Core i5 750 in multi-threading. And while it runs better with games, it's not by much: it just squeaks past the Athlon, but is much slower than the i5.

Overclocking the Athlon gained around 500MHz, while the Phenom clocked up 700MHz – solid but not amazing results.

Overall, the Athlon is the best bet if you want a bargain-basement CPU, and have a motherboard that'll let you make an attempt to unlock it. **JL**

SPECIFICATION

	ATHLON II	PHENOM II
LAYOUT	Quad-core	Dual-core
CLOCKSPEED	2.9GHz	3.2GHz
SOCKET	AM2, AM2+, AM3	AM2, AM2+, AM3
MEMORY SUPPORT	DDR2/DDR3	DDR2/DDR3
CACHE MEMORY	1MB	7MB

CRYO QUAD i5

PRICE £1,139 MANUFACTURER Cryo WEBSITE www.cryopc.co.uk

WE CAN'T HELP feeling there must be some dark art at play here, as Cryo have managed to get a CPU with a base clockspeed of 2.67GHz running at 4.1GHz. And quietly.

Any title you throw the Quad i5's way will deliver eye-soothing frame rates even at the most ridiculously high graphics settings. The Quad i5's superb benchmarks were achieved using 4x

anti-aliasing and every graphics setting maxed out.

This phenomenal power not only comes from the overclocked CPU – the fastest we've seen so far – but a Radeon HD 5870, the most powerful single-GPU graphics card that's available as of now.

Cryo have also shown they know how to pick components generally, with a hefty 1TB Samsung hard drive with a 32MB cache, and two 2GB DDR3

1600MHz GT sticks, a 650W power unit, and a wonderfully quiet H50 water-cooling system from Corsair.

This PC has been built around a Maximus III Formula, one of ASUS' Republic of Gamers motherboards. This combines stunning features including CrossFire and, incredibly, still more overclocking headroom – if you want to risk it.

We've seen so many £800 PCs that one rolling in to our office that spending over of a grand seems luxurious. But in this case, £1,140 gets you the pinnacle of

SPECIFICATION

CPU	4.1GHz Core i5 750
MOTHERBOARD	ASUS Maximus III Formula
RAM	4GB Corsair 1,600MHz GT
GRAPHICS CARD	HIS Radeon HD 5870
STORAGE	Samsung F3 1TB HDD
PSU	Corsair 650W TX

BENCHMARKS

FPS @ 2560 x 1600	
FAR CRY	48
COLIN MCRAE: DIRT 2 ¹	62
WORLD IN CONFLICT ²	42

¹DirectX 11 ²DirectX 10



A beast of a PC at a beast of a price.

performance graphics and an operating system that's capable of making the most of it. The Quad i5 won't disappoint – if you can afford to fork out for it. **AD**

**PCZONE
90**



Pretty ugly,
pretty sound.

ALTEC LANSING EXPRESSIONIST ULTRA

PRICE £170 MANUFACTURER Altec WEBSITE alteclansing.com

NOTE TO PERIPHERAL designers: surrounds made of Perspex sheeting look like a Design Technology GCSE project or, at best, a prop from *Doctor Who*. Except for the huge subwoofer, which stands almost waist high, these don't look like £170 speakers.

Fortunately for Altec, they sound it. Thanks to excellent driver design and

separate amps for bass, midtone and treble channels, this is one of the best desktop kits we've ever heard. Even at this 200W – the set's loudest setting – there's barely a whisper of distortion.

So it's a letdown that the best speakers are coupled with one of the worst volume control dials. The rotating cone is horribly unresponsive and hard to change with any degree

of accuracy. On the upside, there are sockets for headphones and auxiliary input available.

Happily the fundamentals of this set are so good that it's easy to live with the looks and the control system. If you can afford it, that is. **AO**

**PCZONE
85**

PYRA MOBILE WIRELESS

PRICE £54.99 MANUFACTURER Roccat WEBSITE roccat.org

CONVENIENT AND FLEXIBLE, the Pyra Mobile Wireless has excellent range, a very solid battery life (with USB recharging, too) and works like a dream.

It's more than just a wireless mouse, though: it's a wireless 'travel' mouse, so it can be used on trains, planes and even in automobiles (maybe). Once you've gotten used to the rodent's small size, it's perfect for that task.

The question is – do you really need a gaming mouse when a generic wireless one would do on the road? Especially one that costs £55? Unless you're made of money (the theme for this page) the answer is 'no'. This is a luxury product with luxurious results, and is priced far to high to make it an option for the pros. **DB**



For gamers
who commute.

SPECIFICATION

BUTTONS	7
RESOLUTION	1,600dpi
POLLING RATE	1,000Hz

**PCZONE
73**

Reviews by David Brown, Alan Doctor, Jeremy Laird and Adam Oxford

REMEMBER:
A PC'S FIREWALL
DOESN'T PROTECT
AGAINST FIRE

If you're told you need to "install a firewall" in your PC, do not hire a builder to line your computer's case with flame-resistant concrete and gypsum board. Instead install firewall software (like the free *ZoneAlarm* or *Sunbelt Personal Firewall* programs).

Hardware Buyer

This is our favourite PC gear – both expensive and cheap

LOADED?

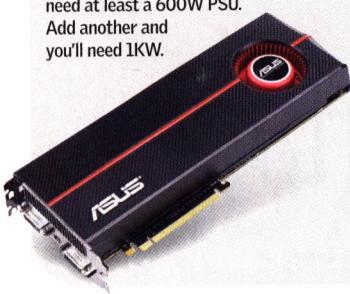
GRAPHICS

ASUS RADEON HD 5970

PRICE £499

uk.asus.com

The Radeon HD 5970 is the world's fastest video card, making it an obvious choice for this slot. Under that plastic shroud are two AMD RV870 GPUs, whose 4.3 billion transistors and 3,200 shader processors knock the GeForce GTX 295 out of the stadium and into the car park. Despite all this power it's not even particularly noisy when under load. If you have one of these cards you'll need at least a 600W PSU. Add another and you'll need 1kW.



INTEL CORE I7 975

PRICE £770

intel.com

The most extreme, most unlocked edition of Intel's quad core, multithreading flagship processor laughs at all modern games. The only reason not to get one is the imminent Core i7 980X, which will have six Hyper-Threading cores and 12MB Smart Cache and be even more jaw-droppingly stunning.



AUZENTECH X-FI FORTE 7.1

PRICE £119

auzentech.com

There was a time when you couldn't build a PC without a Sound Blaster. Today it's all handled by mobos and only fruitcakes buy discrete hardware. Oh really? The Forte is mad for games like nothing else: Dolby Digital Live, DTS Connect, even headphone and mic amps. Proper stuff.

SCREEN



HP

LP2475W

PRICE £450

hp.co.uk

You can buy a 24in widescreen monitor for £150 these days. So why would you want this one? Simple: professional H-IPS screen technology, two DVI-I ports, DisplayPort, HDMI, six USB ports, height adjust, rotate, swivel and tilt, plus 1920 x 1200 pixels to stare at. Why not buy two?

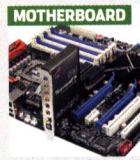


WESTERN DIGITAL CAVIAR BLACK 2TB

PRICE £220

westerndigital.com

Forget solid state for a moment: we're after a data tank that'll swallow music, movies and your Steam folder. For that there's only one choice: the WD2001FAS. Don't be fooled into thinking that large drives are slower than smaller ones. This 2TB model is top of the HDD benchmarks.



ASUS RAMPAGE II EXTREME

PRICE £259

uk.asus.com

ASUS claim the Rampage II Extreme is the "ultimate overclocking board", and looking at the design and specification it's hard to find a more attention-grabbing mobo. It has a massive array of tweaking tools, and you get a SupremeFX daughterboard with a X-Fi processor thrown in.



LOGITECH Z-5500

PRICE £249

logitech.co.uk

We've been advocating Logitech's THX flagship since it was launched in 2005, and although the silver plastic does tend to make it look a little dated alongside new rivals, the simple fact is that great sound never goes out of fashion. Nothing rivals the Z-5500s at this price.

SKINT?

GRAPHICS

SAPPHIRE RADEON HD 5750 VAPOR-X

PRICE £115

sapphiretech.com

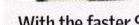
While you could save yourself the cost of a game and buy NVIDIA's GTS 250, Sapphire's HD 5750 is faster, almost silent (courtesy of Vapor-X tech) and brings cool technology within reach of most gamers. Features such as DX11 support, ATI Eyefinity and DisplayPort connectivity simply aren't available on any GeForce. And thanks to CrossFire, the upgrade path is obvious: buy the same card twice.



AMD PHENOM II X4 955 BLACK

PRICE £122

amd.com



GIGABYTE GA-MA770-UD3

PRICE £49

gigabyte.com.tw

With the faster 965 Black at £139 and Core i5-750 at £152, spending that extra £30 on Intel's little belter will sure put a wider grin on your face. But when £30 could buy your hard drive or a set of speakers, and you're on a tight budget, it has to be the Phenom.



IIYAMA PROLITE E2208HDS-2

PRICE £134

iiyama.co.uk

Cheap and unknown brands are often tempting, but many are based around yesterday's technology and won't support connections more exotic than a 15-pin analogue VGA. Which is why we'd go for this 22in Iiyama, with DVI-D, full HD resolution and integrated speakers.



SEAGATE BARRACUDA 500GB

PRICE £33

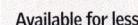
seagate.com



LOGITECH X-210

PRICE £25

logitech.co.uk



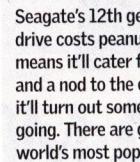
NONE

PRICE £0

N/A



If you're strapped for cash, the last thing you want to be wasting money on is a sound card. It's simply not necessary. Every mainstream motherboard on sale today offers multi channel audio, so hook up your speakers there instead. You'll never notice the difference.



LOGITECH X-210

PRICE £25

logitech.co.uk

Another win for Logitech, a brand people still associate with mice. The X-210s are great value, and despite looking and feeling every inch the £25 speaker set, deliver sub-assisted audio that transcends their budget status. At this price you might find classier speakers, but never a more classy sound.

FO-SHO!



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SHOGUN 2: TOTAL WAR
ON SALE NOW!**

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PCZONE

Freeplay

Mods, maps and free things!

COPY PROTECTED

SOME OF YOU think we don't have any problem with DRM. Some of you even believe that we get sent special versions of the games we review that are magically free from it.

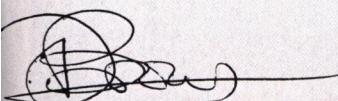
Firstly, I'll call it copy protection from now on because I loathe this new acronym which has been shoved into our minds, because someone thinks 'digital rights management' doesn't sound as much of a pain in the rectum as 'copy protection'.

Secondly, no, we get versions with more annoying copy protection than you. We get games that expire after a couple of weeks, meaning that, if we choose not to review it instantly, it suddenly becomes worthless. On numerous occasions, we've had to have new code sent in so we can get the big games in an issue played on time.

Then there's the confounded issue of serial keys, which we often don't get sent with the hastily copied DVD-R, causing many hours/days to pass between the first time we tried to load the thing and when we actually got to play it.

Game X today, for it shall remain nameless, is all installed and ready to go on the day I'm writing this, but it a) doesn't recognise the CD being in the drive because it's a copy and Tages doesn't like that, plus b) we didn't get sent a serial code for the game.

So that's why I'm devoting my time in this column to this one single point, because I'm writing this instead of playing a game. So, while we don't pay for our games (usually) we do know the frustration caused by painful copy protection systems.



David Brown
Staff writer



UP THE DUFF

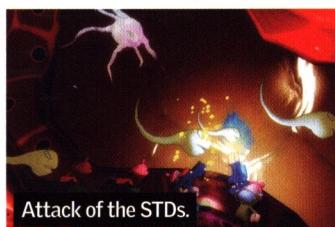
Zombie Cow shows off its *Privates*

WEBSITE zombie-cow.com

SOME OUT THERE in the land of uninformed criticism have been lambasting Zombie Cow's new game, *Privates*, for being puerile and saying rude things about women.

Some people don't get satire, for clearly this is what *Privates* is. How could anybody believe a game that has condom-hatted marines invading vaginas and rectums to slaughter ne'er-do-wells is meant to be a documentary?

So all counter-criticism aside, *Privates* will be a shooter from Zombie Cow



Attack of the STDs.

Studios, the team behind indie hits like *Ben There, Dan That*, *Time Gentlemen, Please!* and *Gibbage*. It's colourful and has the traditional Zombie Cow sense of sarcastic fun, with the added bonus of a big wedge of money provided by Channel 4 in order to kick the production values up a notch.

In total, there'll be five levels of orifice-exploring action, with a whole host of STD-related enemies to vanquish in the name of genital health. Best of all, *Privates* will be available for free on our dear old PC, while Xbox owners will be forced to navigate the hideous interface on Xbox Live uses to make payments.

So if you're in the mood to exterminate the ugly things that hide within the darkest nether regions of Britain's troubled youth, *Privates* will be knocking on your back door, asking to be slipped in, during July.

ZOMBIE COWS

The team speaks



DAN MARSHALL
ZOMBIE OVERLORD

"We pulled out all the stops with *Privates*, pioneering a new technique we're calling '3D'. It's just like all the two-dimensional games you've been playing for years, but adds a third dimension."



CHRIS SIMPSON
LEAD PROGRAMMER

"The breakthrough came when we realised that although objects cannot physically move in and out of the screen, if you make them smaller and larger, the more mentally challenged of players can be convincingly fooled."



ANDY HODGETTS
LEAD MESH TRIANGULATION ENGINEER

"Working on this project was a dream come true because I frequently dream about lady bits, hairy men's bottoms, and rummaging about therein."

PCZONE
FREE-O-METER



Not free!



0
HOURS

*Approximate amount of completely free stuff this month



Free!



535
HOURS*



SNIPPETS



GAIADAI

bit.ly/Gaiadai

Frenetic moments to be had in this mash up of shump and tower defence which took developer Kyle Pulver 48 hours to complete. It's rough, robust but fun defending your flying islands from fish with lasers.



CRUSHD

bit.ly/crushd

Had a nightmare where you're stuck in *Tetris*? In *Crushd* it's your job to help an invulnerable Hulk of a block to scale his way out of a container of falling blocks by dropping more blocks to help.



PROSOPAMNESIA

bit.ly/prosopamnesia

Ever wanted to impress ladies with your elite *Photoshop* skills, but don't have any? Then just load this and run the cursor across the screen to change the picture based on your gestures.



Look, it's Rich Uncle Skeleton.

IMM-ORK-TALITY

Old timer Meridian 59 lives on as freeware

WEBSITE meridian59.com

IF YOU'VE EVER wondered where *World of Warcraft* came from, then take a look at *Meridian 59* – a vintage bit of sword and sorcery fare and a genuine piece of gaming history.

First released commercially back in 1996, *Meridian 59* was the first 3D MMO. Forget about that isometric upstart *Ultima Online*, this is the game that's the stepping stone between the earlier multiple-user dungeons (MUDs) and today's *World of Warcraft* and *Aion*.

What's impressive is that even at the time, the small team was able to develop

and release such a ground-breaking game without any major backing, as they faced problems with poor support from struggling developers 3DO (the people behind the ill-fated console) which led to *Meridian 59* being launched under-marketed and assaulted by the ugly stick. It's hardly any wonder that *Ultima* stole their thunder by offering a fully realised, if two-dimensional, experience.

Enough of the ancient history. *Meridian 59*'s dedicated community have kept the game afloat and funded since a re-launch in 2002, but its former

developers Near Death folded back in January, meaning the game's currently being run by passionate fans as a non-profit enterprise – that means it's free to you and me.

While the game set out to provide player vs NPC combat, it's now primarily an arena for PvP combat.

There's not much in the way of account management at the moment so you'll have to email the fans-developers to get started. Which you should do, if only to give yourself an education in MMO history.

SPOONFUL OF GOO

Is browser-based gaming coming of age?

WEBSITE spoon.net

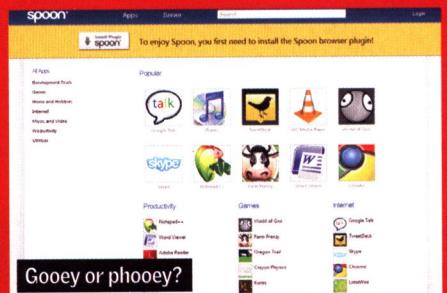
YOU MAY STILL be furrowing your brow as to why *Quake Live* hasn't been followed in short order by other well-regarded streaming-based conversions of top games, but puzzle no more! This is what developers Spoon intend to do, claiming they aim to "make the world's software available instantly, anywhere, on any device." It's a tall order to get it right, but the groundwork is there.

This will mean games running over a streaming client on your PC rather than being installed. Aside from games, other things such as applications and

browsers are available to try. Although why you'd want a browser running inside a streaming client is a mystery, unless you like attempting world-ending paradoxes.

Right now you can download the Spoon plug-in and stream Kyle Gabler's much-loved *World of Goo* to your desktop for free.

The other titles also available for you to stream at the moment are a mixed bag, but include the long-lost 1998 *Half-Life* demo *Uplink*, a demo for *Halo* and *Splinter Cell: Pandora Tomorrow*. Indie Game Challenge finalists are also there to stream



including the recent *Cogs*, *Altitude* and *AaaaaAaaaAAaaaAAAAaAAA!!!*.

Streaming means that the games won't be as fast as an installed version, but the games are only a couple of clicks away and are free. On that basis, Spoon is well-worth investigating.

EXTRA LIFE

The Uprising aims to bring *Half-Life 2* into the CryEngine

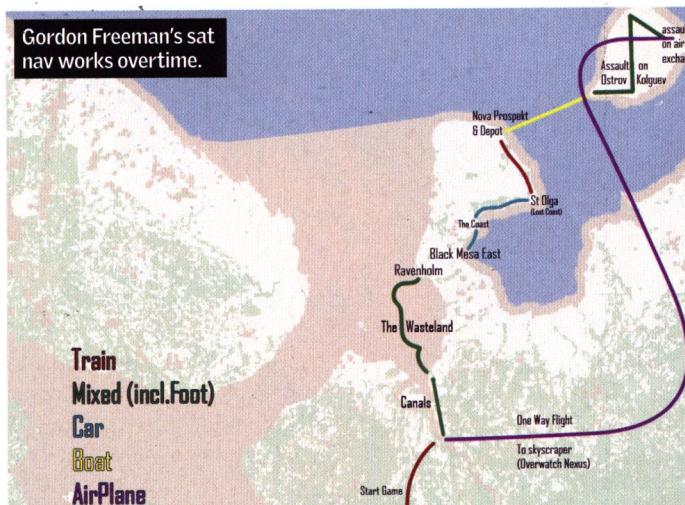
WEBSITE moddb.com/mods/half-life-the-uprising

SPLIT INTO 15 chapters, *The Uprising* is an ambitious project to recreate the whole of *Half-Life 2* in CryEngine 2. Amazingly, it's currently the work of only one person, Ocho, although they're considering recruiting others to help out. That's sensible, as this is a crazily ambitious and exciting project that could take aeons to get out the door.

Ocho has acknowledged the long development time and is planning to drip-feed each chapter to the public as progression is made. The *HL2* modding community seems to have taken very well to the whole thing, providing helpful little maps explaining the routes and twisting pathways of the *Half-Life 2* story, so Ocho has some substantial (and enthusiastic) backing if he wants to call upon it.

There is one issue, though. Legal questions have already been raised, especially about the use of voices and other content from the parent game. Ocho claims he's going to get new voice actors in to re-record the dialogue, but this doesn't get around the fact the words themselves will still be the same as in *Half-Life 2*.

That just leaves the question as to how Valve will react to someone taking their game and making it look a lot better than the original. It may even harm sales if it goes well enough – after all, who'd want to play the old *Half-Life 2* if there was a new version that was free and looked great?



SNIPPETS



CANABALT: TYPING TUTOR EDITION

bit.ly/canabalttutor
This'll teach you. Cruelly, this version of classic one-button runner *Canabalt* can be played as a typing tutor which can cause brain breaks after only 200m.



SUPER MARIO CROSSOVER

bit.ly/supermariocrossover
Newgrounds are hosting a mash-up of 8-bit legends where characters such as Samus, Megaman and Link are able to frolic in Super Mario's 'hood with their own abilities intact.

Bug Fix of the Month



THIS MONTH
DIN'S CURSE BETA PATCH 1.001

"Petrified NPCs can no longer try to solve quests."

PRETTY PICTURES

Revamp the look of your washed out *Dragon Age*

WEBSITE bit.ly/jbtextures



GRAPHICS CAN ALWAYS look better and although the vanilla visuals in *Dragon Age* were decent, complaints were made in the usual quarters about how they could have been sharper with the old detail. Naturally, cue the entrance of the fervent and dedicated mod community, who have produced the *JbTextures 2.1* pack for use with the game.

This mod is tricky for some to get working, but once it's all installed the

difference in some places is stark. Just look at the image supplied here for proof.

One thing that is an optional change is armour, as the mod's creator believes the visual advantages come at too great a cost in terms of frame rate.

JbTextures doesn't change the gameplay at all, but if you're thinking about diving back into Ferelden for another crack at the Archdemon, perhaps you'd be well advised to slip this on your hard drive to pep it up a bit.

Demos

Jon 'Log' Blyth shows you stuff we give you



THE SETTLERS 7: PATHS TO A KINGDOM

**Now then, now
then, settle down**

WEBSITE thesettlers.uk.ubi.com

H URRAY! IT'S UBISOFT!

Everyone loves Ubisoft, because they do that thing with their games! That thing with the internet when you can't not be on it while you play! In case you thought you might be able to get away with playing the demo offline, think again! Not only will you need an Ubisoft account to play it, the always-online requirement is there, too. When we removed our network cable, we were politely informed we had to plug it back in if we wanted to build our city.

So, our goodwill already corroded, we decided to write the walkthrough in the style demanded of us by our angry, angry readers.

If you're reading this, Ubisoft, we're only kidding. You can still send us our regular shipment of corruption jewels.



PROBLEM ZONE

Trouble with your DVD? Help is at hand!

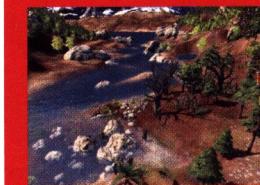
1. If the menu doesn't appear when the disc spins up, open the Run command from the Start menu and enter D:\pcz.exe (D is the DVD drive's letter).

2. If you have a problem with a specific demo or application, check the DVD's Help section. Also ensure your PC's drivers and DirectX version are up-to-date.

3. If that doesn't work check our forums at pczone.co.uk for fixes, or send an email to us at letters@pczone.com. Please describe the problem, what you were doing when it occurred, any error messages that came up, and your system's details.

4. If the DVD itself is faulty, send it and an SAE to Disc Department, Reader Support, Future Publishing Ltd, Bath, BA1 2BW, to get a new one.

We can only provide assistance with technical problems directly related to our cover DVD. The PC.ZONE discs have been tested and certified virus free by an independent organisation. We recommend that you always run an up-to-date virus checker on any software before running it. Future Publishing Ltd cannot accept any responsibility for disruption, damage and/or loss to your data or your computer system that may occur while using these discs, the programs or the data on them. Ensure that you have backups of data contained on your hard drives before running any new software.



SEETHE

What's with a video tutorial, Ubisoft? Can't you put tutorials into gameplay like everyone else? You must really hate gamers! Also you are evil, like Satan.



POUT

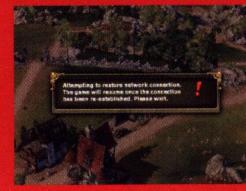
OK so I've worked out you build generic buildings and specialise them with surrounding panels. That makes you a bit less evil. But you're still rather bloody naughty.

"GRR-ARGH WE SAY..."



OH WELL

Is this what you wanted? Because we're enjoying this. It's fun, getting to ignore games. And what xenophobic Brit doesn't enjoy calling the French nasty names?



GROWL

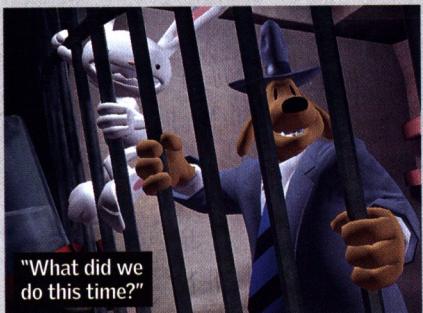
Look, we've unplugged our Ethernet cable to make a point, and the DRM's kicked in. Ubisoft, you're a baby-eating cluster of bona fide monster wanks!

SAM & MAX: THE PENAL ZONE

He touched me in my penal zone

WEBSITE telltalegames.com

THE FIRST TWO seasons of *Sam & Max* were fantastic, if hit-and-miss, but the opener for *Season 3: The Devil's Playhouse*, is a belter. Max gets psychic powers, there are Ape



creatures to fight, WASD controls, and the hit-to-miss ratio of jokes and puzzles has rocketed to record levels of hit.

The demo is the tutorial, which takes place a few hours after the main story, that takes place 25 minutes after a flashback, and is narrated by a guy who's a cross between Rod Serling and that fat Yank from *The Mighty Boosh*.

This new *Sam & Max* makes *Hit The Road* seem like one of their more mundane moments.

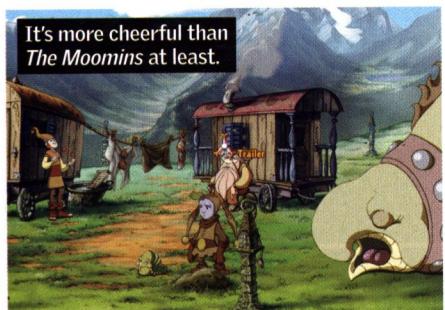
THE WHISPERED WORLD

The whispered what? Speak up man

WEBSITE the-whispered-world.com

WHILE OUR FAVOURITE PIs Sam and Max cover the bases for well-acted entertainment, *The Whispered World* has got all the uncomfortable melancholy you need.

"I know you like jolly stories," sighs the narrator. "But I don't have the strength for that. And what is the point of lying?" Too right mate.



The style of this point-and-click cartoon starts off hopefully, with the feel of an old Saturday morning cartoon. The narrator's sigh, coupled with the mood music, makes you feel like this could really take you into a dark place. Then, it all unpicks – a maudlin clown called Sadwig, who speaks in one of those whining cartoon voices that only makes sense if your balls haven't dropped.

So much devotion has been poured into *The Whispered World*, it's a shame to let twee dialogue and that awful voice stop you giving it a chance. That's why we've put the demo on the disc, see, to give you a chance to like it. Go on, then.



WYTCHE'S BREW

wytchesbrew.com
Indie match-3 puzzler. It's not terribly pacy, and a lot of the arcane naming has little to do with the gameplay, it's charmingly presented and does a few new things. A classic case of try before you buy.



INCOGNITO: EPISODE 2

bit.ly/incognito2
When your suicide is interrupted by a rupture in space, you find yourself playing a tank/RPGFPS/strategy/trading hybrid game. It's definitely worth the price – but that's because it's cheap.

NEW IN S&M



GENERAL SKUNKAPE

It doesn't work when you write it down, but you pronounce it Skoon-kah-pay.



MINDBENDER

Teleportation, turn into things, and read minds: just three of Max's new mental powers.

BEST OF THE REST



A bunch of other stuff you'll find on your disc, if you click hard and fast enough, that is...



AIRPORT CONTROL SIMULATOR

iceberg-interactive.com
Look out for the Volcano patch, which means you have to stare at an empty screen for a few days.



HAMLET

gameletgame.blogspot.com
Go back in time and meet the characters from *Hamlet*. A great way to learn about the play if you're too lazy to read it or watch it.



UK TRUCK SIMULATOR

ultrucksimulator.com
If those European roads felt all wrong-sidey, why not run up and down the M40, taking bananas to Oxford?



HANDBALL CHALLENGE TRAINING CAMP

handball-challenge.com
The first rule of *Handball Training Camp* is "Following rules may not be identical". The second rule is "Play handball".

Freeware

Jon 'Log' Blyth plays with his browser

**ON THE
DVD
PCZONE**

This month, drive yourself to distraction with an even more masochistic version of Tetris, join in with loads of other gamers and draw penises competitively, then play with your orbs – one in each hand (oo-er missus), go all Empire-lite with a TV channel, and hero worship some vermes.

GLICK'S PICK



But it is out to get me!

HATETRIS

DEVELOPER Sam Hughes
WEBSITE qntm.org/hatetris

THERE'S ALWAYS BEEN the nagging suspicion, when you're waiting for that long red one to complete your four-line *Tetris*, that the game knows what you want and it's dicking with you.

Hatetris does away with the pretence, and openly dicks with you, giving you the piece that's of least use at that point. It's a fun idea that, as you might guess, is absolutely no fun to play. It's not even a convincing joke because you get 10 identical pieces on the trot, which ruins the illusion that the original game maintains, that it's dicking with you in a sophisticated/intelligent way.

So, games follow a pattern that becomes quickly familiar: don't expect any of those useful T or L-shaped pieces. In fact, you should learn to expect and deal with a constant stream of those awful S pieces, until the game's made your landscape completely uneven, after which you'll get a bunch of those 2x2 squares.

With a bit of extra psychology, this could be a tantalising headfuck. As it is, it's less like Hannibal Lecter's mind games, and more Jean Claude Van Damme dropping to the splits and punching you in the nuts.

PLAYPEN (FARBS)

DEVELOPER Playpen WEBSITE playpen.farbs.org

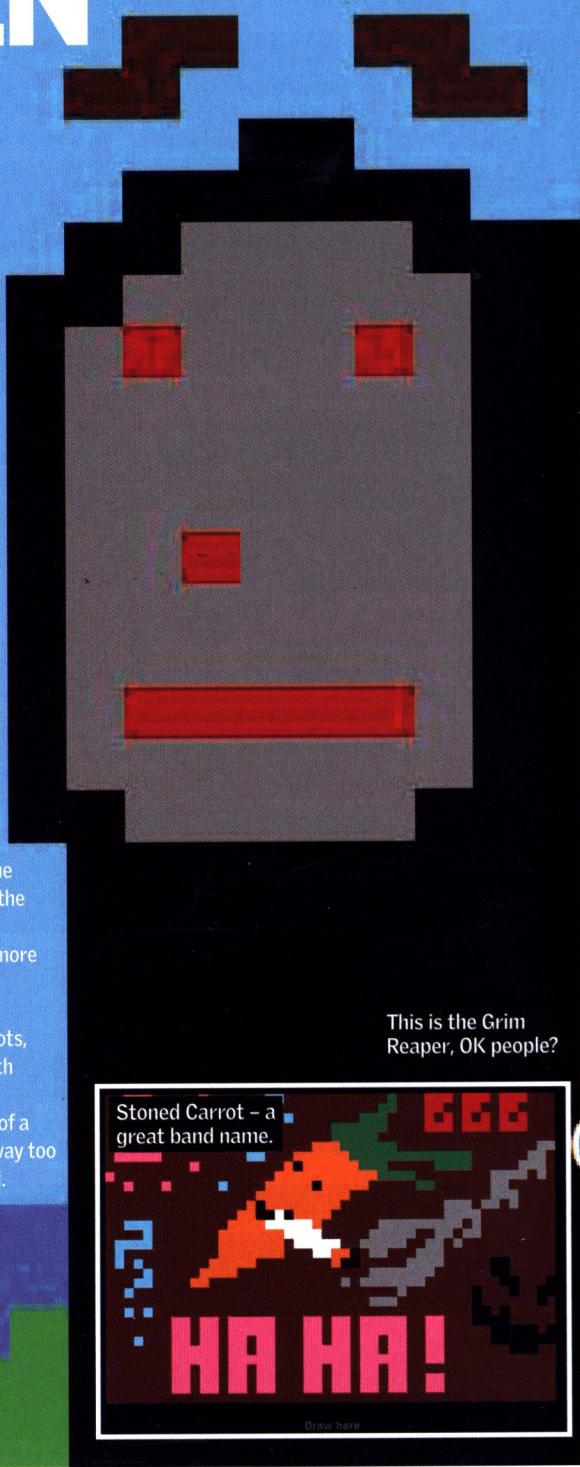
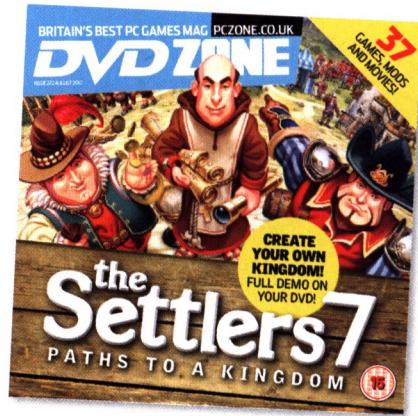
WHEN YOU FIRST start off in the *Playpen*, you might not realise what you're involved with. It might just seem like a ridiculous, kindergarten version of *Samorost*. Once you've eaten the meat, pressed the man's navel and given the carrot some cigarettes to smoke you might think that this is just one man's regression into infancy.

You couldn't be more wrong: this is any number of people's regression into infancy. When you realise that this is a wiki page, a tiny explosion goes off behind your eyes. Everything you see was made by previous visitors. Click on the "edit" button, and you can use a simple paint program to colour in the 30x48 pixel canvas in 16 colours.

Links are provided using the menus below: one box for the rollover text, another for the name of the page to go to, and a button that brings up a grid, allowing you to paint the clickable area. It's stunningly simple. All you have to do is remember to create the page you've linked to. Not everyone does. That's when you'll end up at the Page of Bad Links. But this can be your bit of the story. Every page can link to 10 other pages, meaning the game can get pretty dense, but more often than not you'll find yourself enjoying an interactive cartoon strip.

Playpen is a fantastic mix of talent and idiots, with patiently drawn castles interspersed with badly drawn cocks. It's also pretty well self-regulated, as my obnoxious and irreligious depiction of a certain prophet was quickly taken down for being "way too offensive". Now I know how the *South Park* guys feel.

"This is any number of people's regression into infancy"



MAGIC ORBS

My lovely lady orbs

DEVELOPER iLegendary WEBSITE armorgames.com/play/5719/magic-orbs

THINGS DON'T START well. You're a wizard, who opens coloured doors by holding similarly coloured orbs. You can only hold two orbs, but that's not a problem in the first round. You just go where you can go, and the levels effectively solve themselves.



A game that is truly orb-gasmic.

The second round adds doors that shut when you pick up their coloured orb; and suddenly, it gets a bit more interesting. Now you have to plan ahead, stacking orbs in the right places to get to the exit. The third level does it again – adding pairs of portcullises that don't respond to orbs, but need to be toggled with levers. Some of the best puzzles are in this level, but it's also the level where you start to lose interest: the problem being, you've learned the tricks of the game and all that comes after is putting extra knots in the problem, instead of new problems.

Level four's twist – exploding orbs – just makes it so that levels have a point at which they can become impossible, which compromises the elegance of the



Do you have green orbs? Then see a GP.

previous worlds, in which everything was undoable. This is when I lost interest, and went to stand by the snack machine for 10 minutes.

Still, for a coffee-break puzzler, *Magic Orbs* serves its function, and

keeps you interested for long enough that Armor Games will squeeze a bit of cash out of their advertisers. As long as you don't click on anything, it's a win-win situation that can only end in economic collapse.

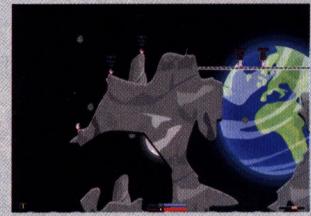


Synchronised cannoning never really took off.



-2s always fled sinking ships.

NON-WEBGAME OF THE MONTH



HEDGE WARS

DEVELOPER Hedgewars Project
WEBSITE hedgewars.org

THEY WON'T BE offended, because the intentions were clear: this is *Worms*. Classic, '80s, pre-"*3D Hogs of War*" on the PlayStation", *Worms*.

Many of the weapons don't even try to hide their homage, with a menu that's full of whips, TNT and bazookas. Meanwhile, some new weapons simply replicate classics, like the Exploding Cake, which replaced the classic sheep. And yes, the cake can walk.

Hedgewars is nothing less than loving, and the range of locations are well-drawn and pretty, and there's even three training levels to get used to the over-sensitive bazooka.

If you've got 80MB of bandwidth knocking around the shop, this is a great way to make sure you don't waste it on mucky JPEGs.

TRAFAVGAR – ORIGINS

Total War on a British TV budget

DEVELOPER Channel 4 WEBSITE channel4.com/play-win/trafalgar-origins

NAVAL NAVIGATION AND combat!

Cannonballs, chain shot, gunpowder! Basically, *Trafalgar – Origins* is a browser-based version of *Total War: Empire*, without all that baffling shit that goes on the world map and all those stupid armies farting about.

Taking the thrill of pointing your side at the enemy and avoiding having your enemy point his side at you, and

combining it with the awesome power of wind, which makes your movements alternately over-speedy and a buttock-clenching crawl, *Trafalgar – Origins* is a challenging take on naval warfare.

You get six training missions – which incidentally fail to explain the four types of shot, but we're PC gamers, this shit has been in our blood since *Sid Meier's Pirates!* – after which it simply

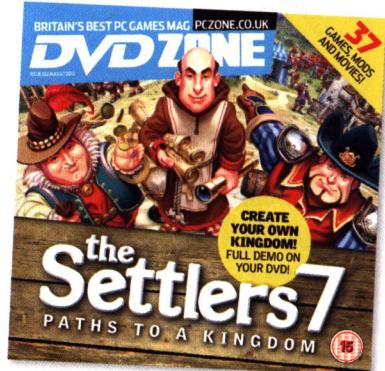
becomes hard. Hard, unforgiving, and consequently satisfying to beat.

The game also plugs into Facebook, so you can annoy your friends with updates about how you wasted your day, while letting Channel 4 know everything about you. If you're lucky, the boss you forgot you added might sack you, as you've become so morbidly convinced that people are interested in the fine details of what you're up to, you lack any context. Make sure you tweet when you cheat on the wife, eh?

Give *Trafalgar – Origins* a whirl, if only to convince Channel 4 to keep making games. They did, after all, get our very own Dan Marshall to make a game about genital diseases, and the more of that, the better.

Extend

James Holloway has mods and maps a-plenty



Freakish taste.
Some Monsterism.

FLESH

An exercise in 'trial and terror'

MOD FOR Half-Life 2 WEBSITE fleshmod.com

VULNERABILITY IS TERRIFYING. Many games have exploited that fact, from *3D Monster Maze* to the *Theft* series. It's the flip side of our shameless love for dual-wielding rocket launchers and meleeing people's heads off. *Flesh* is a mod that follows in this tradition, but places you in a survival horror environment influenced by last year's Russian oddity *The Void* and *Silent Hill*.

After your standard wakes-up-in-a-public-loo-with-no-explanation you find that this is a *Half-Life 2* mod with a difference: it's played in the third-person, there's no strafe and there are – most importantly of all – no weapons. Yep, you're helpless alright,

and there's lots of rustling and gibbering in the bushes! Crumbs!

After finding a car crash and ominous signs you head into the dark woods with nothing but a torch and a hide button to help you. Soon it's clear you won't be going back to your car, as spirits come sniffing for your flesh.

As for gameplay, it seems to be a bit of a standard tool-and-key hunt mixed with convoluted puzzles (who keeps their keys in a log fire?) that help you discover the mystery.

In a twist early on you mysteriously gain the ability to see through the eyes of the monsters hunting you, allowing you to plan ahead and time your dashes past them, making every successful evasion a minor victory. This vision

ability is like spectator mode in online games, and the game highlights your character to let you know if the monster can see you.

The team seem to have taken a lesson from *The Void* and have created an immersive atmosphere through ominous ambient noise, sounds in the darkness, a front end with arcane symbols, and some lovely texture work.

Lighting is fittingly muted and your torch can be used to lure the near-blind lower-level monsters away from routes you want to go, as turning it off makes them stop in bemusement allowing you

to sneak past. Booming church bells make it clear to you that you're seconds away from being chomped on and recede slowly as the threat passes.

Flesh has big ideas and obviously fantastic talent but haphazard execution. Mostly because darkness is dark, figuring out where you need to go next isn't always obvious. And once you've figured out the monsters' patrol routes you feel less vulnerable and more like surviving is one of trial and error.

Despite slipping into a tense, rather than terrifying, middle gear, *Flesh* is still an achievement.

"A mod with a difference: there's no strafe and there are no weapons"



THE GREAT CLASS DASH

Can't. Stop. Running

MOD FOR Team Fortress 2 [WEBSITE](#) bit.ly/greatclassdash

VALVE HAVE ALREADY smiled down from Mount Olympus and blessed the *Canabalt* influenced side-scroller *The Great Class Dash* with their providence, having featured it on their blog. The reasons are: it's a fantastic way of showing off the still sublime *Team Fortress 2* art style, while reinforcing each class's strengths and weaknesses.

Great Class Dash forces you to run and jump, bash, sneak and heal your way through increasingly tricky side-scrolling levels where you have to transform your character into the suitable class for that moment. For instance the Heavy can run through walls, the Engineer can repair teleporters and (bizarrely) the Sniper makes snakes and bats cry and hide.



2D or not 2D?



Heavies don't like hot baths.

You're breathlessly switching on the fly to find the right class for the job, as getting it wrong will mean a fiery end, being shot down by sentries, killed by many instant deaths on offer, or – as a Medic – fail to heal your teammate doesn't get healed, any of which sends you back to the last checkpoint to breathlessly try to get further.

This is all expertly executed and gorgeously presented, it but can get frustrating at times if you're a bit cack-handed and lack any mastery of twitch-gaming.

A friendly word of advice though, *Great Class Dash* does remap your keys. But never fear, just remember to press backspace before you rage quit a level you get stuck on in frustration. Goddamn bats.

LEFT 4 MARIO

It's-a me, Zombie-O

MOD FOR Left 4 Dead 2 [WEBSITE](#) bit.ly/left-4-mario

IF YOU LOOK closely, you'll be able to find Mario's mutilated, defiled corpse hidden under the scenery somewhere. It's a shame you can't brutalise himself yourself, the bastard that he is, but at least you get to see him dead.

Even without the dead Bob Hoskins impersonator, this is a good campaign, challenging in enough areas to eat up an hour of your gaming time. Just watch out for the fiendishly placed

Tanks, they're a right sod to get past at times.

The ending is acceptable, although it's a little too easy to just camp the placed gun or sit in a corner spamming the grenade launcher.

With a few more custom character models – for example big Bowser's

Platform fun.



instead of tanks, the ability to play as Mario universe characters or, at the very least, slaughter them with extreme prejudice, – this could really be a great campaign, and even without such additions, it's well worth your time.

FAIRY TALE

More like a fairy fail

MOD FOR Civilization IV: Beyond the Sword [WEBSITE](#) moddb.com/mods/fairy-tale

THIS MOD IS disappointing. Firstly it initially didn't play well with Steam, and secondly, with a name like *Fairy Tale* you'd expect The Seven Dwarves to be face off against cackling Disneyfied witches in Shrek-style smackdowns. What you get is a standard fantasy hodgepodge that filches ideas from *Morrowind*, *Oblivion* and surprisingly, Ray Harryhausen's skeleton warriors.

You're given the option of playing in campaign or scenario, and can choose from a range of fairy tale and fantasy nations, including the standard-issue elves, undead and the like, some with shockingly punning names like Anvinga.

Effort has been made to tinker with Civ4's backend to provide more mystical powers and abilities, but not much has changed in the graphics save for a few new units. The result is a serious mishmash of effort and laxness.

That said, this is a half-decent crack at getting fantasy into *Civilization*, that is if you can deal with the lack of graphic updates and the annoying tendency for knights of the realm to end sentences with "That would be so cool!"



New unit: giant men with sticks.

MOD CONS!

The add-ons to avoid



So tasteful.

LEOPARD SKINNED ROADS

MOD FOR Just Cause 2 [WEBSITE](#) bit.ly/leopardskinnedroads

Dirt tracks just don't look right unless they've been re-skinned to look like cheap leopard fur, or the kind usually seen coating the legs of a Blackpool B&B landlady. There's nothing like dead animal pelt feel under your tyres to get you into the gaming mood.





JUST CAUSE 2 MOD ROUND-UP

David Brown tinkers with Rico's seedy underbelly...

MOD FOR Just Cause 2 WEBSITE justcause.com

AS OF NOW, the Holy Grail for *Just Cause 2* modders is the yet-to-appear map editor. But they're certain to be cudgelling their brains for an answer to that problem.

Despite lacking that tool, the *Just Cause 2* community has really gone to town – there's even a multiplayer mod in the works. Don't ask how this is going to work yet, but rest assured we'll check it out the second it's available.

In the meantime, there's a whole world of mods out there to play about with, the most important of which being the *BOLO Patch*. Running behind the scenes, it gives you infinite lives and ammo and, most importantly, the ability to use multiple grappling hooks and to specify whether they're breakable.

"The Just Cause 2 community has really gone to town"

Now, as you can imagine, throwing even just one more grappling hook into play could lead to carnage on a massive scale, but when you can use as many as you want, the possibilities veering towards the limitless. For a start, you can deal with the pesky Panauan military by turning on infinite health then proceed to attach people and objects to each other at a frenetic rate. It's possible to attach so many corpses and flailing bodies to your vehicle that the game's engine will fail at handling the physics involved, giving up with a whimper and a swift crash to the desktop.

The purpose of this article isn't to merely say "We did this and that..." it's to inspire you to go out there and do something that we couldn't even

conceive of doing. That's the challenge, and please do send us your concoctions to letters@pczone.co.uk.

The *BOLO Patch* is merely the tip of the iceberg. A lot of the community's focus is being directed into making the already-stunning environment look even better, and to remove irritants, such as the Black Market cutscenes that appear whenever you request a new vehicle or weapon.

There's also a burgeoning Moon-altering movement, where a picture of Peter Griffin/Hitler/the Death Star/the McDonalds logo replaces your traditional Luna motif.

At the moment, then, mods for *Just Cause 2* seem to be one part crazed grapple-flinging and another part texture swapping. The forthcoming multiplayer mod, if it ever gets off the ground properly, and editing of the terrain itself (beyond changing the dirt to look like

ON THE
DVD
PCZONE

PCZONE

leopard skin), are the main goals for the community, but we're a way off that yet.

You can find every last one of the listed mods on your DVD, which you hopefully haven't thrown in the bin or used as a makeshift frisbee. **PCZ**

SKINNED ALIVE A Top 10 Alternative Main Character Skin List

1. RAIDEN (*MORTAL KOMBAT*)
2. MR T
3. FEMALE STRIPPER
4. SCORPION (*MORTAL KOMBAT*)
5. THE PUNISHER
6. GHOST (*MODERN WARFARE 2*)
7. CHUCK NORRIS
8. BOLO SANTOSI
9. BABY PANAY
10. DUKE NUKE M

THE BEST OF THE MODS

Some of the mods you might consider enjoying...



1. BLOOD SKY ECLIPSE

While it might not change the actual gameplay at all, you'll just have to kick back and gaze lovingly at the horizon as the sunlight bleeds out into the red of dusk, waiting for nighttime to come along with its inky blackness and ruin it all. While it lasts, *Blood Sky Eclipse* adds another layer of beauty to an already lovely game.



2. NO BLACK MARKET CUTSCENES

A simple enough change, but a very necessary one. The black market item delivery service is topped and tailed by annoying cutscenes, forcing repeated clicks and/or keyboard thumps to get to the menu. Eliminate the need for anger with *No Black Market Cutscene*, one of your most important weapons in the fight against the oppression of annoying cutscenes.



3. HD IMPROVED CLOUDS

Apparently, the clouds in vanilla *JC2* are 'ugly'. Such a situation could not be left as it was, so Ineedasotch decided to re-fluff them and generally making them prettier from above and below. All cloud particles were replaced, shadows were added and all manner of technical tweaks were made. Cirrus cloud fanciers will be disappointed, though, as these were left as-is.



4. CLOUDS 1.4

There's not just one essential cloud-based mod, there are two. Boy3510817's work builds upon that done by Ineedasotch, improving the general cloud effects, plus updating the visual range and the density of the fluffy white stuff. All fine and dandy for cloud lovers, so if you've installed the former, make sure to shove this on there too.



5. TRIGGERED BOMBS V2 WITH DAMAGE

This one is a doozy. Not content with the already substantial damage one can inflict upon buildings and areas on the island of Panau, H1Vtg3 modded the triggered bombs' explosive capabilities, making them go off with the force of the explosion from the Mile High Club bomb. That is, very big and very deadly.



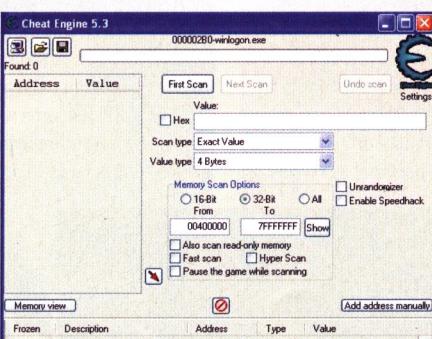
6. INCREASED GRAPPLING RANGE

And speed, don't forget the speed has been upgraded. Essentially just a grapple mod that allows you to spear things further away than usual. Pridit's mod has solved some of the 'non-stick' issues others have been having and is a must-have. Just make sure you know that a missed grapple might drag you off towards a distant island.

Name	Date modified
projects	01/04/2010 12:52
Gibbed.Avalanche.ArchiveViewer.exe	31/03/2010 22:47
Gibbed.Avalanche.bin2xml.exe	31/03/2010 22:47
Gibbed.Avalanche.FileFormats.dll	31/03/2010 22:47
Gibbed.Avalanche.Setup.dll	31/03/2010 22:47
Gibbed.Avalanche.SmallPack.exe	31/03/2010 22:47
Gibbed.Avalanche.SmallUnpack.exe	31/03/2010 22:47
Gibbed.Avalanche.xml2bin.exe	31/03/2010 22:47
Gibbed.Helpers.dll	31/03/2010 22:47
ICSharpCode.SharpZipLib.dll	07/08/2008 22:31
license.txt	27/03/2010 21:58
NDesk.Options.dll	31/03/2010 22:47
readme.txt	27/03/2010 22:15

7. GIBBED TOOL PACK REV.4.1

It's all well and good having custom *Duke Nukem* skins, but what if you want to make your own stuff? Maybe there's a picture of your partner in the nude that you want to plaster all over the sky? If so, the *Gibbed Tool Pack* is what you need. Actually, it's the essential tool for editing and converting the game's files. A must for all would-be modders.



8. CHEAT ENGINE

This isn't a *Just Cause 2* exclusive, but *Cheat Engine* is an open-source trainer-ish utility that's best used to slow down time. Ideal for capturing amazing screenshots and videos in a game already renowned for splendid visual set-pieces. There's a whole shed-load of other things you can do as well, but the time-slowning is the most useful.



9. GOD MODE

Some people have been reporting having trouble getting the *BOLO Patch* to run, so if you fall into this category, there's always Ghost of T-Pain's *God Mode*. It's self-explanatory – it makes you invulnerable – but in case you have no luck with *BOLO*, it might be useful. Also try Gaul's *Unlimited Ammo* and DasMatze's *No Hit Reactions* mods.

Online Zone

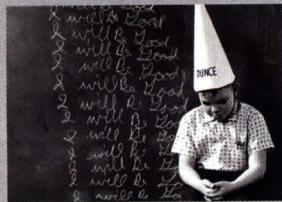
What's new in PC ZONE's forum and Fight Club

Come and take on the Zone Staff in our monthly online gaming free-for-all!

Back to the arena we went, blistering South American metal accompanying us as we did so. Zone Chat was a rather fishy affair this month and Twitter provided us with the ability to laugh at the mental prowess of some *StarCraft II* fans. Finally, the forumites decided to declare themselves old, useless and afraid of youngsters with strange trousers.

tw@tter

Tweeting like a bird



THIS MONTH WE decided to celebrate the arrival of everybody's favourite pill-popping, ghost-guzzling circle, Pac-Man, on Google. Not everyone was so welcoming to Zombie Cow's new game, *Privates*, as they earned ire, mostly from witless morons who take things too seriously. If you're a witless moron, please don't follow us or respond to our tweets. We'd say you know who you are, but you probably don't.

We're also pleased Steam is on the Mac as now, in certain games like *Killing Floor*, you can fight against your white mouse-wielding cousins as they stare bemusedly at the sight of something that doesn't have a grey sheen all over it on their screen. Cross-platform play is a potentially wonderful thing and one of our favourite things, Steam, is at the forefront. If you've already had some experience of this, please do tweet us up about it.

Finally, we were disappointed by the lack of math savvy some of you showed, getting our Zerg ice cream question wrong and failing to win a *StarCraft II* beta key. Ten Zerglings to one ice cream and 89 ice creams was the answer. As calculators exist on all PCs that was shameful.

That's all for this month, remember to follow us using @pczone and get involved in all the bird noise fun.

FIGHT CLUB

Taking you down to Arena Rock City

PLAYING A CHALLENGING online shooter like *Team Fortress 2* needs concentration, dedication and perspiration. It also needs you to pay attention to sounds and your surroundings, not listen to extreme metal while playing.

Krisiun was the office's band of choice for this session, although not necessarily a unanimous decision, and the Brazilian brutal technical death metal might have raised temperatures and seared the flesh off our bones, but it stopped us hearing cries for medical aid or other important battlefield sounds. It certainly put Steve off his aim, his arrows finding the walls more often than the grey matter of his enemies.

STEVE'S FAILS

Granary was where the PC ZONE tent was first pitched, where a respectable 22 players were eager to get stuck into each other.

Steve soon became aggravated by his team's rubbish play, which forced him to sit out a couple of rounds. This frustration led him to keep changing classes, becoming a Pyro and a Spy between bouts as an arrow-firing Sniper. Nothing improved his game too much and he continued to see the frozen image of his killer more often than not. However, a bit of personal glory was



The hilarity of rape humour.

achieved when he managed to knife former ZONE workie Ed Fenning in the back. This is how we reward people who devote their time to helping us make this magazine.

Eventually, things moved on to Nucleus, where we first spotted the individual, SirRapesalot. A quick chuckle at his offensive name quickly turned into a scowl of anger as he proceeded to ruin the many attempts at a group photo later on. Also, for some reason, people kept on coming into the game and asking "Is this Fight Cleb?"

"A quick chuckle at his offensive name quickly turned into a scowl of anger"

After a good old go on both Granary and Nucleus, twice each, it's probably about time we shifted the TF2 server from Arena. The sitting out of games was becoming a little bit annoying by the end, especially when you would end up being transferred to the opposite side when you finally re-entered the fray. This made taking a group photo more fraught with danger than usual, as the photographer got swapped just as he had said "Everyone in the Red Spawn for the photo." Turned out to be the Blue one in the end, but luckily enough you made it. See you next month for a different game, we promise.



NOTES FROM THE FORUM

The merits of PC ZONE and *hack-spit* PC Gamer analysed

SCARLET_PIMP: PC Gamer is a pretty boring mag to read in my opinion, but always seems to get exclusives before ZONE. Do more people buy it or something? Can't see why. Anyway, keep it up, ZONE. I still love you after 12 years.

PEACHFUZZ: Normal people read PCG. Those same normal people have conversations and socialise. We are not them.

HALRICK: Us Zoners are the select few that have seen the light. PCG readers know nothing of the superior level at which we live our lives. They still think l33t sp34k is all the rage.

CHO-KONNIT: Us ZONE cats are all hip to the jive, daddy-oh!

LIQUID_METAL: PCG are too loud, and they won't get off my lawn.

BYRNE453: Personally I read ZONE because I trust the reviewers. I started

ZONE back in the good ole days when the reviewers each had their own specialised genres. I miss Chris Anderson, the RPG whore that he was.

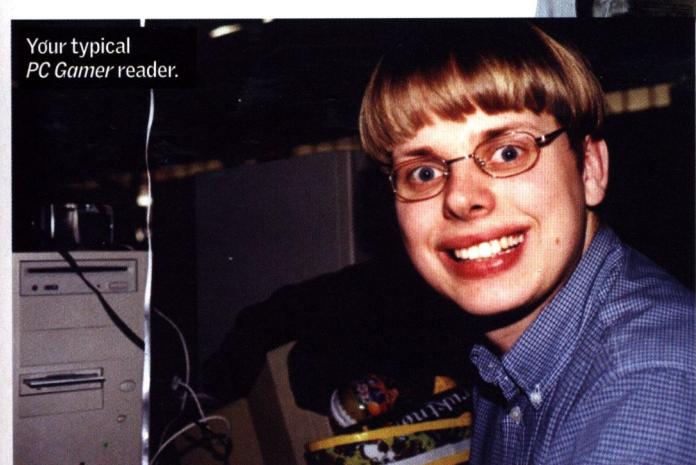
SCARLET_PIMP: Are we, as PC ZONE readers, the cool indie kids of the PC gaming world or are we the outsider emos who don't give a toss?

PEACHFUZZ: Or the bitter old men, sick of those kids messing around by the bins in their hoodies playing their hippety hop and drinking alcopops?

SLACKDOG:
Did someone call?

"Get off my lawn.
Damn kids."

Your typical
PC Gamer reader.



CAN'T MAKE FIGHT CLUB?

If you find yourself unable to make it to Fight Club – perhaps you're eating a scorpion on a stick in China – please feel free to join other PCZ readers on the following public servers. We may even join in some time.

WHO'S WHO

Steve Hogarty [PCZ]misterbrilliant
David Brown [PCZ]plughead
Phil Wand [PCZ]peoplesfrontofjudea
Jon Blyth [PCZ]log
Will Porter [PCZ]batsphinx

BATTLEFIELD 2

85.236.100.48:16567

COD 4: MODERN WARFARE

85.236.100.48:28960

COUNTER-STRIKE: SOURCE

85.236.100.48:27015

DAY OF DEFEAT: SOURCE

85.236.100.48:27315

HAL-LIFE 2: DEATHMATCH

85.236.100.48:27215

TEAM FORTRESS 2

85.236.100.48:27115

BAD COMPANY 2

Look for "PC ZONE" in the server browser.

SERVERS PROVIDED BY...



ZONE CHAT

The great debate



"I'M AN UTTER moron and I hate me" said Fisherman+Prostitute, perhaps in response to the trend of naming English Civil War battles. It might have just been a plaintive whimper in a sea of verbal carnage, but it was good to see some self-effacing humility for a change.

His name seemed to spark some kind of culinary discussion, with Rafusmelafus declaring that "my curry is finally ready." Even writing those words makes you hungry. Also, personal pizzas from Pizza Hut make Fight Club regular Flatline hungry, even though he denied it, claiming it was Domino's he loves, not Pizza Hut. We know he's lying though, he can't fool us. Going back to Indian food the conversation turned, perhaps again inspired by Fishermen+Prostitute, in a piscine direction.

Dave Lemon didn't believe that fish curries were made out of dead piranhas while sea bass, turbot and haddock were suggested as ingredients, although the winner was perhaps the plankton curry

idea. Responding to a question about weird foods, TheTingler said he'd seen bug kebabs and scorpions on sticks in China. An oddly named chap piped up and said he'd eaten fried crickets, while Lt Armstrong suggested garlic bread with vinegar and cheese on it. That sounds tasty though, so it isn't weird.

More games, less fish next month, we promise.



HOW TO JOIN IN!

To be a part of next month's ZONE Chat, join our Steam Community group: PC ZONE (PCZ). If you don't have Steam, first be ashamed of yourself, and then download it from steampowered.com. Keep an eye out for announcements in that there Steam group for the date of the next chat event...

Retro Zone

Facing the wrong way since 1995...

Flashback

MAX PAYNE

WE MAY HAVE been denied the mirthless pleasures of Remedy Entertainment's latest shooter, 360-exclusive *Alan Wake*, but we can always go back and play the decade-old game that made our Finnish friends famous.

Max Payne is most famous for introducing bullet-time to the gaming world, allowing us to side-leap through doorways and let off a shotgun into the chest of the thugs in the subway. Strange to think how bullet-time, something now considered to be an eye-rolling cliché, was once a game-changing delight. Strange, and impossible to replicate when you go back to play it again.

Max Payne: the game where you do this.

Max Payne is also pretty famous for having a lead character who looks like he's chewing a mouthful of chins, but these days, where slow-motion has been repackaged a dozen times as adrenaline, heightened awareness, and enhanced reactions – the only thing that really stands out with *Max Payne* is Max Payne himself. A grumbly depressive who narrates his own life, alternating between flat description and hackneyed noir metaphor.

SLO-MO NOIR

There are odd moments, where you leap sideways across a doorway, where you find yourself tilting in sympathy, and making little "boof" shapes with your mouth to mimic the shotgun shells landing in your enemy's guts. It's still fun



Why the smirk, Mr Dead-Wife?

to play, but with so much of the novelty worn off, the laborious self-regarding grey of the writing really shines through.

But it's important to remember this game's status as an innovator. But if you're going to play a *Max Payne* game for nostalgia, the sequel stands up more impressively to modern scrutiny.

However, you deserve to play *Max Payne* again, just to put the movie into perspective. Perhaps it wasn't such an unspeakable atrocity, unloaded on a worthy, helpless victim. So do play *Max Payne* again – if just to remind yourself that maybe the film wasn't so bad after all.

**But how? It's legal this time...**

If you're seriously asking us how to play *Max Payne*, stop being stupid. Just buy it on Steam or Good Old Games. However, you'd be far better asking more pertinent questions, such as "Why not change the title of the box, when it's no longer relevant?" Our reply would be, "Next time, maybe we will. Certainly, there's only so

long you can get away with meta-boxouts like this one, without disappearing into a quantum anus of your own creation."

Here are a few links to help you:

Steam: steampowered.com

Good Old Games: gog.com

Random meta-humourist: is.gd/cepZv

GCSE English Learn the tricks of the noir writer's trade

**1 HUMANIFY**

Everything has emotions. Telephones are angry, doorbells are scary, and the sun is a prick.

2 METAPHOR

Why tell the truth, when you can tell strange lies that are analogous somehow to the truth?

3 SIMILE

The autistic-friendly metaphor, that doesn't ask you to believe a woman's legs are a dual carriageway.

4 FORE-SHADOWING

"I have to survive two more walls, or you might end up with uncomfortable moments like this."

5 THAT'S META

Respect the fourth wall, or you might end up with uncomfortable moments like this.

6 FICTION WITHIN FICTION

Alan Wake does it too. What TV shows do moody game characters watch?

Now & Then

FALLOUT: NEW VEGAS vs VEGAS BANDIT



LAS VEGAS IS a great location for games. From the Clancified squad tactics of *Rainbow Six*, to the wholesale undead butchery of *Dead Rising 2*, casinoland is a great excuse to use loads of flashing lights and machine payout sound effects.

So, why Bethesda decided to transform the prostitution-packed gambletopia we know and love into an alternate reality holiday resort, no-one can say.

B&N Companies got it right in 1994, with their simple and effective slogan, "You can't escape from the one-armed bandit." They're right, because *Vegas Bandit* is nothing more than a single screened bandit, and pressing Escape doesn't do anything.

However, it's statistically stacked to win, so the *Vegas Bandit* even has that essential role-playing element: a number, going up. Watch and learn, Bethesda.



Play it! Get the bandit back on your desktop

1 If you want to play the least entertaining fruit machine on Earth, you can download *Vegas Bandit* from a number of sites. It's less than a megabyte.

2 Home of the Underdogs is still not up and running now properly. We miss it, as it's good to have a trusted site to go to in the dangerous world of doing technically illegal stuff.

3 *Vegas Bandit* is an old DOS game, so you should install DOSBox. You'll be making your life easier if you put it into an easily typed folder such as c:\arse\bandit.

4 Mount the folder as a pretend drive in DOSBox and enjoy the very essence of futility: stakeless and utterly rigged gambling, without even a hooker to cheer you on.

MAMEframe DIET GO GO

JUST LIKE SNOW Bros, *Diet Go Go* is a two-player co-op game that made you want to go home and play *Bubble Bobble* again. This time, instead of capturing enemies in bubbles, or encasing them in snow, you're feeding them pink apples until they're so fat you can bounce them around the level. It's begging for a Ricki Lake episode to be named after it: "Fat Monsters And Their Abusive Feeders".

The tiny twist is: they're trying to feed you, too. One sundae hits you, and you transform into an obese creature with impeded movement. A second dessert causes an instant and fatal coronary, unless you can find a diet drink. It's nutrition exactly as the food and drugs industry wants us to see it – lethally delicious éclairs, with



The Multiple Arcade Machine Emulator runs over 3,500 games. You can get it from mamedev.org or from this issue's DVD (we've also got 32 and 64-bit versions of MameUI, which has a nice interface). But downloading games for it is illegal. So don't.

carcinogenic aspartame as the only immediate antidote.

Or perhaps it's just a dumb game. Perhaps I'm reading too much corporate conspiracy into the whole thing. I'm only really complaining because I found myself licking the screen when my mum walked in.



Time Trump

THE WORST OF... ISSUE 132

THIS WAS A month when expansions like *Morrowind's Bloodmoon* and *Warcraft III's The Frozen Throne* impressed us. It was a month when *Republic: The Revolution* bagged an Essential award, despite a scathing second opinion from Keith Pullin. It was September 2003. But what were the bona fide turds of the moment?

HUGO - SMAKKABALL SCORED - 10%

"The sort of shit we used to give away."



EXPENDABLE SCORED - 21%

"Forget content, it's meaningless shooting across one garishly lit backdrop after another."

STARTERS ORDERS SCORED - 32%

"Bad enough to turn even this optimist into a right old cynic."

COLD ZERO: NO MERCY SCORED - 45%

"It's like the designers tried to do *Diablo* or *Fallout*, and ripped out the combat system."

NEIGHBOURS FROM HELL SCORED - 48%

"If you want neighbour terrorising tactics that go beyond a single day, try living in my flat."

There are no beer goggles strong enough...



Alien Infestation The best worst acting around

The most notable thing about *Giants* is the acting. It's so willfully bizarre that it's impossible to tell whether it's good or bad. Cockney Mecc Baz, Tel and Reg are convincing enough, but the Smarties are all over the place – with classic London orphan Timmy, angry Scottish grandad, and a father and mother who've been touched by Cornwall. Then there's the Sea Reaper Delphi, who may or may not be Russian.

It's hard to explain why this amateurish, overacted dialogue and over-worked jokes is so effective. Then you realise that the whole game feels like Planet Moon are having a bunch of fun. It's infectious; you forgive the lack of comic timing because the game's so full of ideas and heart.



Back In The Day

GIANTS: CITIZEN KABUTO

Jon 'Log' Blyth discovers everything he missed the first time around

DEVELOPER Planet Moon PUBLISHER Interplay PRICE \$5.99 (£3.00) @ gog.com

THE FIRST TIME I played *Giants: Citizen Kabuto*, I got stuck. It's not an easy game. There are no quick-saves, no mid-mission checkpoints, no difficulty settings, no regenerating health, and it doesn't take much in the way of gunfire to kill you. Often, the blast radius from a rocket will kill you, even through two feet of rock. It's not easy. In fact, *Giants* occasionally

gets you burrowing a knuckle into your tear ducts in frustration.

In Mecc leader Baz's favour, he's got squad members he can deploy, a range of defensive weapons such as a shield, a bush to hide inside, and an endless supply of free health syringes from the shops, providing you can get to one before a sniper takes you out.

What I'd forgotten was the charmingly mistimed slapstick and the

startlingly fresh dialogue. It's not the best line in the world, but you just never hear anyone saying "I'm just an old man, my balls are saggy" these days. And *Giants* is full of half-squinting moments like that.

After one of your squad mates uses his bush camouflage to have public sex with one of the local species, he declares that he "Likes to get himself a little taste, now and then." And the dysfunctional home life of the Smarties is straight out of one of the better *Monty Python* sketches.

**"You just never hear anyone saying
'I'm just an old man, my balls are
saggy' these days"**



Offspring



These two introduce you to the Giant's reproductive cycle.

"Giants may be frustrating, but we haven't had a game adopting this reckless, playful tone for a decade"



That was my memory: a funny, hard game that I never got around to completing. Here's what I missed out on – and the many loyal fans of the game will be appalled at my ignorance – I missed out on two playable races.

The Mecc were the traditional race, mixing gunplay and special weapons with *Tribes*-style jetpack antics. But I'd never even seen the Sea Reapers, let alone the mutant Kabuto that gave the game its title. Why did I think the game

was called *Citizen Kabuto*? I can't say. I just thought they were being wacky.

EGGS AND MEALS

If the Mecc are *StarCraft*'s Terrans, the Sea Reapers are the Protoss – spiritual types who use magic instead of high technology (or use, as Arthur Clarke puts it, tech that is so high it seems like magic). They can teleport, leaving behind a decoy dummy. They can also slow down their opponents. This is



I'm sure me wife can help you. Just bring her back now so she can cook me BLOODY DINNER!!!

Multiplayer

You'll be lucky...

The single-player game is a multiplayer tutorial, introducing you to the elements of the game one at a time. But actually getting a multiplayer game going isn't going to be easy. There's nothing in the way of dedicated servers or server browsers, and the "join game" option is far from noob-friendly. It'll be near impossible, then, to play with a group of randoms – you'll need to co-ordinate your sessions.



extremely useful, given the jetpacks that are employed by the Mecc.

Then there's Kabuto – a one-man army, who doesn't need to worry about using the Smarties to build bases, or store food from the wild herds. He just eats them until he's big enough to lay eggs, and delivers wrestling moves from a menu that feature dignity-free attacks like "butt flop".

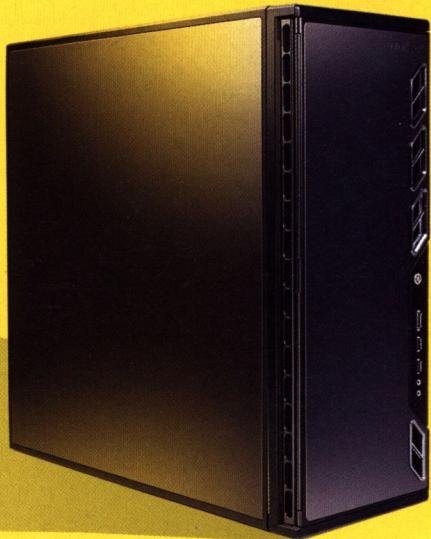
Yes, it's childish. But it's that perfect pitch of well-delivered childishness

that's more sophisticated than it lets on. With so many games taking themselves seriously, it's fantastic to play a game that gets most things right – controls, the balance, and the fast-paced combo of offensive and defensive kit – and still takes the piss every opportunity it gets.

Giants may be occasionally frustrating, but we haven't had a game adopting this reckless, playful tone for a decade. If you haven't already bought it, get it now. **PCZ**

On the PCZ Hard Drive

The games we're playing and why we're playing them



PRO EVOLUTION SOCCER 2010

Kicking Off: Adam Glick

NEVER, EVER TRUST anyone who says *Pro Evo Soccer* delivers the most 'realistic' representation of football on a PC. That was true five years ago, but not any more.

No, stop arguing. You're just holding onto a rose-tinted nostalgic view of the series. It's dead in the water at the moment, barely even bothering to stay afloat as its clunky interface and feel drags it into the depths. Yet it's still the best football game on the PC.

Anyone who has played the *FIFA* games on the consoles in recent years knows that they're very, very good.

The World Cup game has been gracing peoples' living rooms for ages now and it's so far ahead of what we PC owners have to deal with, it's criminal. Why Konami doesn't just put that version on our beloved system instead of releasing an archaic PlayStation 2 port is beyond me.

If you're worried about people refusing to play with anything other than keys, don't be. Force a pads-only option, or just let

them use keys, if they want to. If it's too difficult, so be it. It's the players fault if they want to persevere. Just let us play the 'good' version. It's so painful to have to play the shockingly bad *Pro Evo* games, still riddled with the same stupid problems, the same idiotic commentary and the same press releases, year after year, that say "revamped" this and "Master League improved!" that. They didn't even let us pick Huylens, Castolo and company in that particular mode this year.

Next year's version will come out, which will look a tiny bit better than this one, feature the same commentary

(including the remarkable place-holder comments that still remain – "Header 2!" anyone?) and still play like the pitch is made of treacle and the players have to struggle to lift their legs. It's just horrible from beginning to end.

So PC football fans need to pray for one thing: EA to feel a twang of guilt for neglecting its loyal PC supporters for so long and get around to releasing a current-gen *FIFA*. Otherwise, next year will just be *PES 2011* and its handful of meaningless tweaks.

VERDICT: Farce-ball



Badly simulated overpaid teenagers.

LEFT 4 DEAD 2

Chainsawy: **James Holloway**

THIS ONE'S GOT legs this one, I'll give it that. After neglecting it on its release, influenced by all the brouhaha about *Left 4 Dead 2* being a shameless cash-in and murmurs of the game going quickly to the great forgotten game chest in the sky, I've found myself picking up Nick, Rochelle, Coach and Ellis. And now has *Left 4 Dead 2* truly got its claws into me.

"That must be 'The Passing'?" I hear you say. But to be honest I'd be having head-smashing melee fun without Valve recently tossing us a new campaign, a couple of new weapons and some interesting weekly game changing mutations.

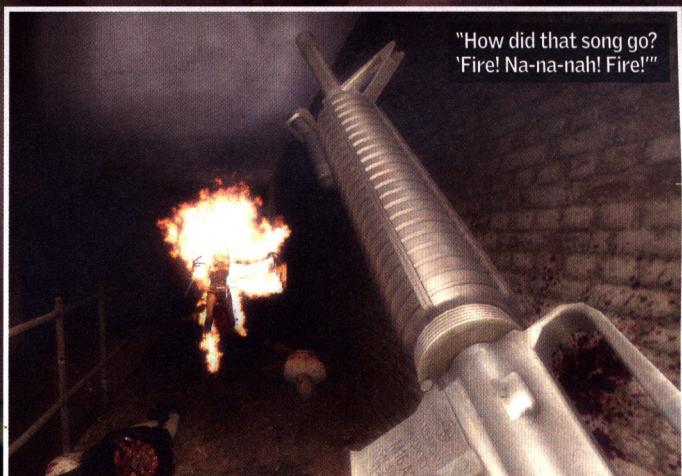
The *L4D* diehards may still be griping, but *L4D2* is an immensely better game in every way. I'm kicking myself that I didn't check to see what the reason was for the Hard Rain campaign getting the breathless praise during last year. (If you are yet to fight off Infected during a tropical storm, then you are all the poorer.)

The new mutations that Valve have been delivering on weekly basis for

a couple of months has already had me clamouring for more 'Realism Versus' games, where the Survivors have to do without neon outlines showing exactly where their teammates are, and a harrowing/hilarious time can indeed be had for both humans and infected.

Luckily Valve has listened and made it a permanent addition.

VERDICT: Revived



SPLINTER CELL: CONVICTION

Prison Breaker: **David Brown**

IGNORING THE HATEFUL DRM that requires your PC to be permanently attached to the internet, for a minute, it's easy to forget that *Conviction* is actually a very good game. There's one thing wrong with it (apart from the pointless and rubbish Iraq level) and that's that it lets me get away with things too much.

Frustrating though it might have been, I'm one of those people who likes to complete a mission without ever being detected. I usually end up giving up and just ploughing through to the end, but the intention is always there.

Conviction doesn't place much emphasis at all on getting you to do things "properly". You can get pretty



much get discovered as often as you want and it doesn't really matter, which is a shame.

Maybe there should have been a hardcore mode, where you had to remain undetected for the duration of the mission. Mind you, having said that, I'd probably just moan about that being too frustratingly difficult.

Some people, eh? How can one really recommend this without appearing to be a sell-out though? It's tricky, but if you don't necessarily have a problem with the DRM, the game's underlying quality is enough to mean you get value for money.

Now Ubisoft just need to make the public multiplayer matchmaking system to work, which is another issue entirely.

VERDICT: Imprisoned



WHAT'S ON YOUR HARD DRIVE?

Readers on their chosen poison

AGE OF CONAN

Thinking about having another look again as I now have a graphics card which does not scream for mercy at the sight of the beach scene right at the beginning.

Andy Monahan

CIVILIZATION IV

My social life is now nonexistent. If anybody wants me, I'll be busy razing Paris to the ground. That's what the French get for refusing to trade their precious clams with me. Fear my wrath!

hyrne453

BATTLEFIELD: BAD COMPANY 2

One hour and counting on downloading the upgrades I need to play the game.
g_hughes



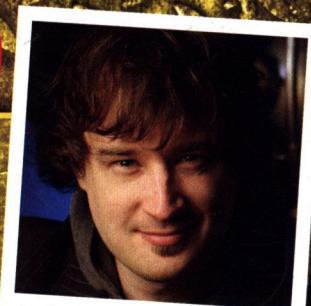
BIOSHOCK 2

Will Porter continues probing 2K's Jordan Thomas

SOME PEOPLE LOVE to talk. Jordan Thomas, 2K Marin's creative director, is one of those people, providing so much information that it simply wouldn't fit it all into one article.

To deprive you of so much juicy truth nuggets would be doing you a disservice, so a second set of pages were forged in your honour. Trust us when we tell you this vast amount of words (and those in the last issue) was but the tip of the

iceberg, thousands more words still reside on our Seld-M-Break hard drives. But enough of that, below Thomas talks about front-loading, internal workings and how young people and women reacted surprisingly well to being asked to play a struggling father.



Jordan Thomas
Creative Director,
2K Marin

01 FRIENDS AND ENEMIES

"I think given how controversial the multiplayer was when we started, the reaction's been surprisingly positive. I don't mean that the product development department was particularly surprised because they always believed, but it was

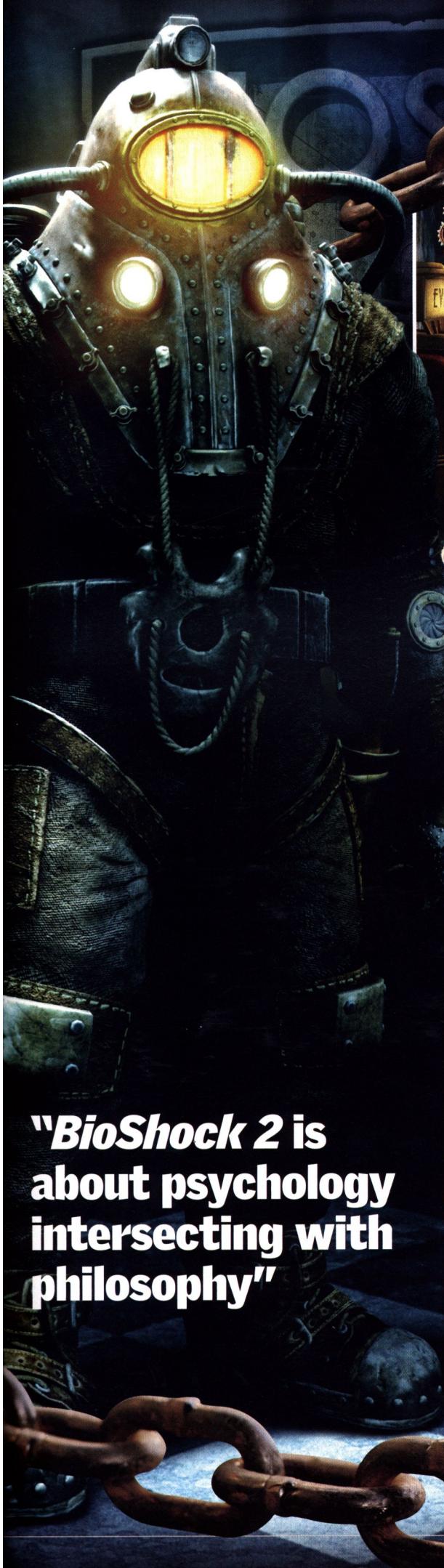
controversial and every preview we had had some scepticism about the multiplayer game. Digital Extremes, and a couple of the internal people who were assigned to work with them, deserve a lot of credit for having brought multiplayer to Rapture in any kind of way that keeps the property bar high."



02 SPHERE OF INFLUENCE

"If you stand still in *BioShock*, things are designed to drift to your area of influence and back out of it. You've got security, wandering Big Daddies and splicers on patrol. So gatherers looking for Adam, protected by a protector, get menaced by aggressors. The thing that was broken with the ecology of *BioShock* was that aggressors would systematically attack the protectors. That's wasn't cool as it leads to you turn a corner and find everything's dead. The idea that patrols of aggressors and protectors might overlap, so that you might use one or the other, or accidentally gets involved, is how we built them."



A large, detailed image of the BioShock 2 protagonist, Little Sister, wearing her iconic mechanical suit. She has glowing yellow eyes and a metallic body. A thick chain hangs from the top right corner of the frame.

Dirty mare.

Collected Dollars (3)



03 PLOT POINTS

"BioShock 2 is about psychology intersecting with philosophy, while the first game was economics intersecting with philosophy. I hear a surprising number of one-off kudos who got one piece of it and loved it to death, but a total comprehension rate is unlikely, because there's a lot of small references in there. But BioShock doesn't require total comprehension to be enjoyed. The backbone story is extraordinarily simple, and we had to boil it down further and further and further before shipping the original. It was way more complicated to begin with, and the same was true of BioShock 2."



That satisfying sight
of a fresh audio log.

04 BALANCING ACT

"Very early on we determined that narrative in multiplayer, and any kind of subject that you might mine out of it, would be discovered by the player through dozens of random interactions that weren't directed, or at least not guided. In a multiplayer game you have to be honest about how likely it is that people are going to hear and comprehend this stuff, because they're even more freaked out: they're even more concerned about every little moment, worried that someone might attack."

LOOKING BACK COMMENTARY

05 FANCY IDEAS

"At first, there was some really subjective, dreamy stuff. There's one sequence in the game where you see from the perspective another character. There used to be more like that, but it made for terrible gameplay.

"You were exploring Eleanor's backstory in person, so you saw her twisted memories of the place, through this filter. You'd see that freaky harlequin which is in the art book, and that's the dream space version of the ceiling crawler. And it was very cool looking, but again the gameplay was really, really bad. We couldn't destroy anything to close off areas while pretty people fired Tommy guns at you, just didn't work. Things like oil slicks, the environmental hazards which are so critical to a well-tuned BioShock level, didn't work in that setting.

"I had to be slowly and painfully schooled by cooler heads, because I was very into that stuff, and I would still love to do a game that has that general aesthetic."



Big Daddies
are so touchy...

06 FEAR FACTORY

"Fontaine Futuristics is a really good example of the creative relay race. The original idea for Gilbert Alexander came from myself and designer Tynan Wales. It was very loose back then, the level was wildly, wildly different. At some point it was handed off to Dean Tate, a *BioShock* veteran who's now at Harmonix. It's really his level design magnum opus, and he worked on it exhaustively out of the Australian studio.

"The script and the character of Alexander were my department, and John Hillner who plays Gil Alexander is bloody brilliant, and so he brought a lot to the character himself. I'm very proud of the level, because I do think that it is probably the single most *BioShock* level in the game."



Fontaine seems like a nice guy.



Reggae lyricists feel at home in Rapture.

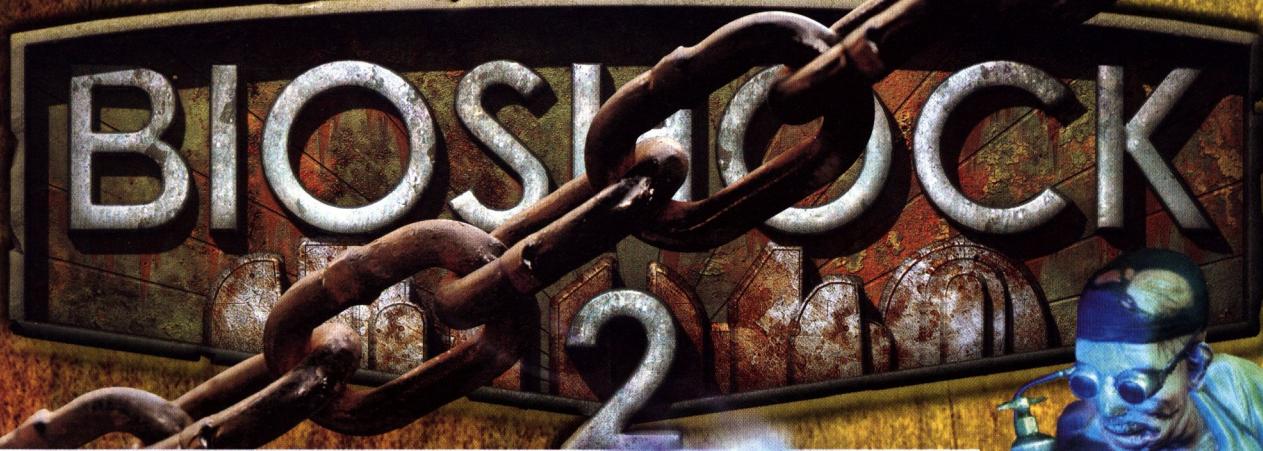
07 LESSONS LEARNED

"One thing that's been cited is that the beginning of the game is kind of slow, and that's because it was reworked a lot of times. I think the biggest mistake I made was starting too big.

"A lot of the ideas for *BioShock 2* added weirdness and were cool on their own. You could talk about them and get excited, but the fact is that investing in them would've taken polish away from the core. If I'd dialled that focus in earlier on, in a smaller story in a larger setting, then the beginning could have grabbed you earlier, and that would've been worth it.

"Just playing a level that feels like it belongs in Rapture has an immense cost, and so I think that I underestimated that cost, and as such I'm much more proud of acts two and three than I am of act one."

BIOSTICK



08 UNDERSTANDING FATHER

"The people that seem to get the game at near-100% comprehension level are brainy gamers and your Tom Chicks for whom it resonated personally. I think part of that comes from a mature perspective, but it doesn't guarantee that they're parents themselves, but they have at least considered the implications of their legacy will have."

"That said, I've met very young players who'd never considered themselves in that role before. So that expansion at what happens near the end where they realise their significance was a big moment for them, and it also meant some people entirely whiffed. It's like 'You know what? Not for me,' and that's OK too."

"I'm personally interested in relatively mature themes, but I also knew that in a shooter, with a limited budget of comprehension given the fact that bullets are flying past your ears every few minutes, I knew that I had to focus, so the number of inputs into that system are relatively few – there are more than the first game, but still a modest amount."



09 CHOICES CHOICES

"We tried to front-load decisions with grey context to offset the fact that your inputs had to be very honest. We have strict interactive fidelity rules in *BioShock*, because you're a wrecking ball rolling down corridors with dozens of flavours of death to serve up, it's not cool to let you into a room with somebody and dial those down to just two. That meant that all of our story characters need to live behind glass, and that when you're finally alone in the same space with them you can do whatever you want, but that the two outputs that are easy to read, your intent, are live or dead. The challenge in the writing became about making you feel differently about each one in turn. I wouldn't say that it's a massive leap forward of morality in videogames, but it's an honest way to try to divine the players intent. Just to front-load you with as much as we can and to let you make a very simple choice."

LOOKINGBACK NEVERQUEST

STEVE HILL'S

NEVERQUEST

Steve Hill is across the *Entropia Universe*...

I'M GOING LOCO down on Planet Calypso. After carefully choosing my underwear, I'm spat into the world in standard-issue mental patient crepe jumpsuit, the random pattern of which makes it look like I've fouled myself. Apart from the scant wardrobe, I'm given a contraption that's apparently for gathering animal sweat and then thrust into what appears to be a living prog rock album cover. Half-naked people are running about like crazed hippies. Others stand still, staring blankly into middle space. It's genuinely bewildering.

Coming across an imposing building called Bank Neverdie, I wander inside. It's like an empty nightclub, the centrepiece of which is a macabre gold statue of somebody grappling with an unknown beast. Cheesecake soft rock

permeates the building. For something to do, I use the Shazam application on my non-iPhone to identify the song as *Best Day* by Graham Colton. It thankfully ends, at which point Lemmy from Motörhead says, "If you can make it to my castle, I'll hang you," as some ambient bleeps kick in.

SWEATY GRIND

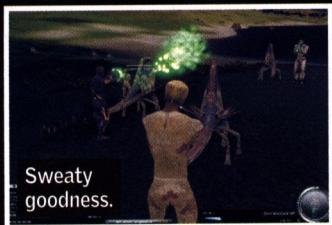
This is more than I can cope with, and I head for a white stairway, gun turrets track my movements. Heading into the trees I find two blokes selling weapons, armour, clothes, tools and furniture. One sports a beret with shades, the other a Santa hat. Both have angel wings. I'm not buying.

Spotting a flightless bird, I point my contraption at it and harvest some sweat. A nearby human is rocking a mullet, chin-glove, shades and Stormtrooper armour combo.

"Where am I? What is this place?" I ask, waving my sweat-harvester.

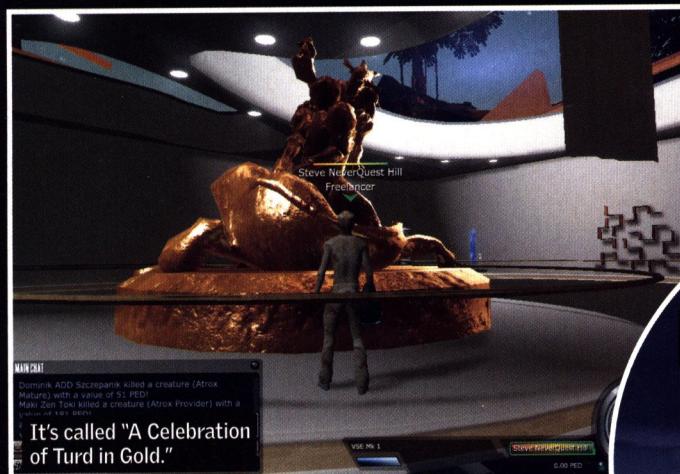
"Not far from the swamp," replies Left Shield Dingledine, who then offers to take me there, which involves running up and down a mountain.

The swamp provides rich pickings for sweat-gatherers, and I set about



Sweaty goodness.

"I'm thrust into what appears to be a living prog rock album cover"



It's called "A Celebration of Turd in Gold."



Hill cheats, and still manages to be a loser.

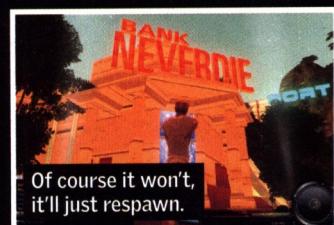
harvesting a female Snablesnot. The beasts don't give up their sweat freely, and I'm swiftly killed by a hysterical Combibo. Reviving at the base of a turret, I find myself surrounded by a group of weirdos.

"Hey Steve... nice to meet you," say Al Radioman.

Much like Hoxton, it seems that in Calypso, you're never more than 12 foot from a DJ.

"Hi, nice dancing," I say to this one, who is gyrating wildly, despite the fairly sedate music. It turns out he's listening to his own radio station, which he convinces me to tune into. It plays exactly the kind of generic hard rock you would expect very angry hormonal gamers to listen to, I throw some shapes anyway, including an impressive devil horn.

My boy Left Shield joins in, yelling "Bring 'em on, let's fucking party like we have no sense!" He then offers



Of course it won't, it'll just respawn.

a magic axe to the person who can name the next song and artist.

NAME THAT ROCK

Using Shazam, I blurt out "Limp Bizkit," but I've gone too early. Next up is *Du Hast* by Rammstein, which I have typed and ready to go when he sets the challenge. Impossibly, a shirtless prick called Flash beats me by a millisecond.

With Left Shield now offering a dollar a song, I spit out "Alice In Chains, *Man In the Box*," but again I've jumped the gun. Determined to make a buck for my efforts, I hold my mobile up to the speakers for the next one, only to be bluntly informed that my trial Shazam subscription expired.

Flash infuriatingly identifies Buckcherry's anthem, *Crazy Bitch*, followed by Disturbed's *Down With the Sickness*.

Penniless and furious, I rage, "You're all disturbed." "Go to bed, Steve," says Calyptoranus.

Must be a Final Fantasy refugee.



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Winners

TINY COMPO

220: Graham Grahams
Winning Ghostbusters

KING OF LETTERS

220: Jason Hudson

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SMELL JARGON

In the olden days, smells were caused "miasmas", and were believed to cause a range of illnesses. Smelling an armpit would give you scrofula, and if you copped a whiff of a fat man's sick bag, you'd probably end up with the Black Death.

To be completely capable of reproducing the full range of smells, the SmellVIDIA Miasmox contains small amounts of diseases thought wiped out for decades.

The company promise that these smells will never be released into the air, and are only there "for the purposes of accuracy and a sense of historical value".

The Miasmox's lead designer, Marta Farmer, explains: "Can you imagine having to explain to a 13 year-old child that his smelly face capsule doesn't have any medieval diseases in it? I can't imagine how that conversation would go at all."



At last: a complete sensory experience.

SMELLVIDIA MIASMOX

PRICE £248.53 MANUFACTURER SmellVIDIA WEBSITE techradar.com

WHEN ALEXANDER GRAHAM Bell invented the telephone, the very first thing he did was put it to his arse, do a big trump and say "Can you smell that, darling?" He didn't understand that's not how smells work. At least, it wasn't how they worked – until today!

SmellVIDIA have come up smelling of roses with the Miasmox, a tiny lip-top trough that picks up Bluetooth signals from a bundled pong-dongle. So, when you're in detective mode in *Batman*:

SPECIFICATION

NO. SMELLS	4,092
PROCESSOR CACHE	2MB
IS IT NICE	Sometimes
FAVES	Skunk-apple
WORSTIES	Man-At-Arms' Boxers

Arkham Asylum, and you're on the trail of a stubbed-out cigar – BAM – a thick stink of leafy embers swirls into your nostrils. Later on, when you're following the trail of a girl's DNA the pellet strapped underneath your nose fires a blob of translucent paste into your nostril that smells exactly like human DNA does.

The Miasmox works much like a printer, combining the 26 primary smells of nature, the 'elements of whiff', to make the vast range of olfactory experiences we encounter in life. Once these guffs have been isolated into their containers – or 'stink cartridges' – it's simply a matter of firing them into the air in the right proportions. So the rich honk of Millionaire's Shortbread is simply a matter of combining 70% Caramel, 20% Popcorn, and 10% Millions Of Pounds. A surprising example is Chicken Sandwich, which is

convincingly woven from Cobalt and Emu Tinsel.

After three hours of play, we found that our test room became chokingly thick with aromatic dusts, and during the humid weather these powders drew moisture from the atmosphere, forming a pungent paste on our carpet, desk and faces. Sadly, the atmosphere proved too rich for the office German Shepherd, who suffered a fatal asthma attack.

After seven hours, we became so overloaded with potent, primary odours that we succumbed to a hysterical feeling of God-like hyperosmia, and starting believing we could smell odourless items, like water and souls.

This led to an episode in which two members of staff thumbed their eyeballs in, feeling that the reports of a regular office environment were a treacherous lie, at odds with the magical omni-smell that was firing

constantly into their sinus. We didn't try to stop them. Nothing smelled wrong to us.

Days passed, and the cartridges eventually emptied. We were naked, tribal and nearly dead. People we loved were gone, and a new group of people, threatening people we didn't remember, sat in their chairs. Who these people are, I cannot say. Just that they asked me to write this review, and I have. Perhaps now they'll let me smell them. **PCZ**



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PREVIEWED

STAR WARS: THE OLD REPUBLIC

Incredible new sections of the universe's biggest MMO revealed. Massive news! The space race begins here!

SHOGUN 2: TOTAL WAR

Creative Assembly in shock return to feudal Japanese roots! Full reveal of the new RTS in the next issue!

REVIEWED

STARCRAFT II

Zerg rush! Ke-ke-ke-ke! Other StarCraft II words! Next month we deliver our verdict!

ARMA II: OPERATION ARROWHEAD

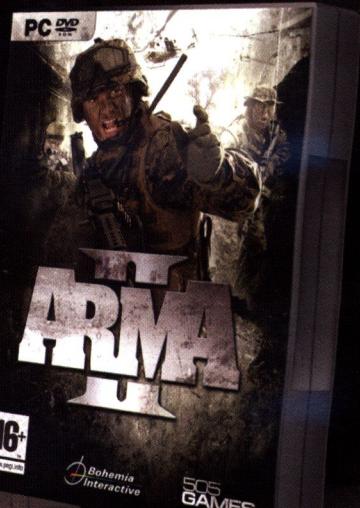
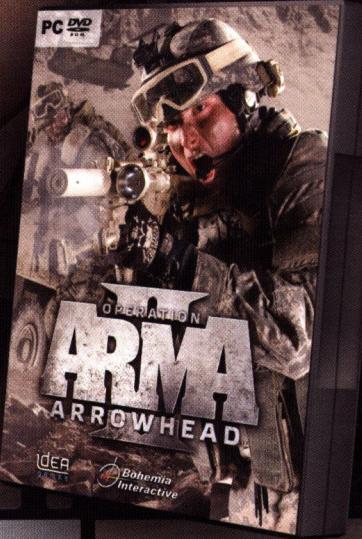
The world's most realistic army simulation gets sand in its pants. We have a good old rummage!

STANDALONE EXPANSION PACK TO ARMA 2

OPERATION **ARMA** ARROWHEAD



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- Does not require the original Arma 2



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